# Real Learning Real Futures

## A BRIEF EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

### A Derwent District Partnership

Bothwell District High, Bridgewater High, Claremont High, Cosgrove High, Derwent Support Service, Glenora District High, New Norfolk High, Oatlands District High, Ouse District High, Rosetta High

with

### Derwent District, Tasmanian Department of Education

### Roger Holdsworth

Australian Youth Research Centre
Faculty of Education, The University of Melbourne

**Acknowledgements and thanks**

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Innovative curriculum, daring pedagogy, hands-on learning programs, and community-based project learning are at the heart of alternatives challenging schooling systems that are increasingly groaning under the weight of an industrial era institutional history.

A number of schools are working to challenge this paradigm. New ways to enthuse students and to provide them with a measure of control over their learning are being developed. Barriers between schools are being eroded. Teachers are becoming more innovative. Authentic learning is taking place in more and more diverse settings. This report focuses on one group of schools in Tasmania's Derwent district attempting real learning for real futures.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum has been pleased to assist this group of schools, Education Tasmania and its regional office to examine the first year of a major initiative designed to re-engage students through collaborative projects and partnerships with local communities. We thank Roger Holdsworth of the Australian Youth Research Centre for studying these schools and preparing this report.

We hope the report provides food for thought for all educators and policy-makers to consider how more authentic learning can take place and the ingredients needed to make it a success.
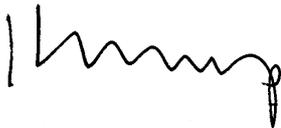
Jack Dusseldorp
Chair
Dussledorp Skills Forum

# 1 | Describing RLRF

## 1.1    This Report

This report on the **Real Learning Real Futures** (RLRF) Program is provided to assist other schools and areas to examine one response to the diverse needs of young people within and through secondary schools. The first part of this report provides a 'snapshot' of this Program in the Derwent District, Tasmania in October 2003.

This report is commissioned and supported by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) as part of its interest in ensuring that all students have access to a quality education and are enabled to experience success in learning. A national seminar convened by the DSF in June 2003 brought together approximately 20 educators to share ideas around 'alternative education'. Rapidly this seminar focused on the need for 'alternatives within' rather than 'alternatives to', challenging the 'mainstream/alternative' concept, and proposing the need for other models that were inclusive, appropriate and challenging.

The DSF was also interested in the example provided by 'production schools' in Denmark, in which students learn through organising and implementing hands-on and productive projects.

Various Australian examples were also provided of Programs within schools, between schools, within communities, in partnerships and so on. **Real Learning Real Futures** stood out as a model on three grounds: first, it involved ten schools and a District Office working in collaboration; secondly, it strongly argued that students 'at risk' should not be isolated into an 'alternative program'; thirdly, it was grappling with issues about 'authentic learning' in which students were engaged in 'real' and community-based projects.

In October 2003, information was gathered from students, teachers, principals and others involved with Real Learning Real Futures. This evaluation was to serve three main purposes:

- Provide a snapshot of RLRF;

- Present a critique of RLRF for participating institutions;

- Develop some recommendations on RLRF directions.

In essence, the evaluation asked three sets of questions:

- What is the Program/component doing? Why?

- What are you doing well? How?

- What can you do better? How?


**Part 1:**

In the first part of this report, the work in the Derwent District is summarised within the context of current curriculum directions. Much of this description draws on existing material from the Project, together with observation of a small number of projects during October 2003.

(The word 'Program' is used here to signify the overall inter-school approach; the word 'project' is used to signify an individual activity offered with the whole Program.)

**Part 2:**

The second part of this report provides further information about the Program's operation for the schools involved including a listing of issues being faced. This contributes to on-going reflection by the schools and provides some recommendations for possible directions.

**Part 3:**

Finally, part 3 of the Report summarises lessons drawn from both these parts and identifies implications for other schools, districts and systems interested to develop their own responses to student needs.

## 1.2    Background / Context

### Purpose

The Real Learning Real Futures (RLRF) Program has been developed as a response to the needs of students and schools within the Derwent District in Tasmania. These needs are both individual (enhanced participation and success for students who are not experiencing that) and systemic (development of appropriate curriculum for all students that encourages increased rates of participation).

The Program's operation therefore draws upon ideas of 'at risk' and 'mainstream', but goes beyond that to explore ways of stepping outside the isolation and separation of some students, and of developing learning approaches that are applicable to all students.

Thirdly, the Program involves high-level cooperation between all ten Derwent secondary schools, which pool resources to provide a shared range of learning projects for students throughout the District.

The Derwent secondary principals have written in their introduction to the Program that they believe that managing and retaining students centres on engaging students in authentic learning projects:

> *Present strategies, including the current MARSSS (Managing and Retaining Secondary Students at Risk) Programs have made a significant impact in our schools. However, to maximise the effectiveness of the total resource, partnerships between schools and their respective communities provide greater opportunities than those available to individual schools working on their own. This project seeks to develop a collaborative approach to addressing issues of participation, attendance and retention in the Derwent District.*

### Summary

The RLRF Program began operations at the start of 2003, following discussion and development late in 2002. It also built on existing projects and approaches in some of the participating schools and in Derwent Support Service. These approaches had focused on placement of students, particularly those deemed 'at risk' of not successfully completing schooling, in a variety of community locations for various lengths of time.

In 2003, these approaches have been extended and formalised between the schools. The three main features of the Program are:

- The ten schools with secondary enrolments in the Derwent District work collaboratively to provide a linked set of projects which are characterised as having hands-on/experiential approaches, develop high engagement of student interest and student ownership, and operate in small groups;

- The projects are 'authentic' insofar as they use Project-Based Learning methods that involve real projects, real timeframes and real outcomes;

- The Program has a strong student support component with mentoring and work placements a feature.

The Program builds on the strength of each participating school and enhances each school's capacity to efficiently and effectively offer activities to its own and other schools' students. It also implies significant challenges (and potentially changes) for the schools, both in terms of Program operation and also in its relation to the ways in which the overall curriculum is structured and presented. This latter challenge is also grounded in curriculum renewal initiatives within the Tasmanian Department of Education, in particular as a response to the adoption of the Essential Learnings Framework.

**Project Area**

The Derwent District involves schools from Cosgrove High at the southern end of Glenorchy City (just north of Hobart), through to Ouse District High in the Upper Derwent Valley, to Oatlands District High in the Southern Midlands.

Information from the District indicates:

> *Derwent District has the highest Educational Needs Index (ENI) of any District in the State. ENI is a broad measure of poverty and also reflects the complex set of poverty-related problems faced by families, particularly where the poverty is generational. The symptoms of the issues being faced by these families are reflected in educational statistics such as suspension rates (double the rate in Derwent compared to all other districts), retention and participation.*

> *Within any geographical area, there are areas of high and low economic wellbeing. Derwent District is unique amongst Tasmanian education districts in that 74% of schools are above State average ENI. This contrasts markedly with all other districts, which range from 29% to 45% of their schools being above average ENI. While all districts have areas of very high need, this figure highlights the extent of the need as being demonstrably large in Derwent.*

> *The extent of poverty in Derwent is also confirmed in a DHCS report[1] in which a range of health and wellbeing indexes are assessed. Of southern local government areas, Brighton (824), Tasman (924), Derwent Valley (929) and Glenorchy (942), have the most disadvantaged socio-economic index scores. Three of these LGAs occur in the area served by Derwent District. The Glenorchy Social Plan [unpublished draft, 2002] ... highlights many of the problems faced by families in disadvantaged communities.*

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[1] Department of Health and Community Services (1999) *Community Profile Southern Region. Health and Wellbeing Outcomes.* Information Series Paper No. 2.

**Student Target Group**

The Program provides activities for a broad range of students, while maintaining a specific focus on those it considers 'at risk'. However, the schools see such 'at risk' categorisation as deriving from limitations in the provision of appropriate educational options.

The Program information says:

> *Each school has targeted a group of 'at-risk' students using participation/engagement indicators (attendance, literacy, behaviour etc). These students are those identified at risk of not continuing with their education beyond Year 10.*

They then go on to describe a Program context from which all students will benefit, but "where we make much better provision for our students 'at risk' without isolating them from the mainstream."

**Program Development**

The RLRF Program arose from discussions between the principals of secondary schools in the District during 2002 about extending existing arrangements. There has been a history of Derwent Support Service providing placements for 'at risk' students in community and work locations and it had operated the 'Riverkeeper' Program for students from District schools for two years; one school had been operating a farm for many years which supported both its Agriculture curriculum and also work-based placements of school non-attenders; several of the schools had prior strong involvement in 'student enterprise' curriculum; there was strong interest and action at some of the schools in developing individual curriculum reform around ideas of middle schooling and 'authentic learning'.

In June 2002, the principals made a commitment to a collaborative District approach. This was seen initially as a way "to increase the range of opportunities to engage students through Project-Based Learning, on-line learning and work placement/enterprise opportunities". While there was some initial concern that some operational details were unresolved, a decision was made to begin the Program at the start of 2003 and to reflect on and develop its operation as it progressed. This process was seen as an 'action research' approach in which data would be collected about the initiatives and their impact, and reflection would assist further Program development (which would, in turn continue to be investigated in an on-going cycle).

Strong support was provided by the District Office, both in convening the Program's development, and also in providing resources for its implementation. The Office continues to be a strong force in maintaining a collaborative cross-District approach. The Program says:

> *The nexus between collaboration and competition between schools remains an interesting area for us to work on. The cooperative nature of the projects also has the potential to blur the boundaries of what a school is. In some senses, a multi-campus Derwent District School cooperatively catering for students in the area can be conceived.*

## 1.3 Concepts / Intentions

The RLRF Program was developed with a range of intentions. These started with 'increasing student retention and participation in education', included decreasing negative behaviour lead-

ing to suspension, and also addressed the need for establishment of future vocational links. The activities offered within the Program attempt to encompass and balance these.

The Program talks of outcomes for:

- **students**: development of extending experiences, opportunities for practical learning, and pathways for the students undertaking these courses to further learning and work;

- **individual schools and for teaching/learning approaches**: an increase in the range of experiences that schools can offer students, and development of 'authentic learning';

- **the District**: increased cooperation between schools.

RLRF also links strongly with existing curriculum directions at both the State level (tying strongly into the Essential Learnings) and within individual schools.

The objectives listed in the initial planning for the Program are (with some clustering provided now):

- To increase student attendance.
- To increase student retention, including senior secondary completion rates.
- To reduce student levels of suspension.
- To reduce punitive behaviour management interventions.

- To increase student engagement with the curriculum.
- To increase student learning outcomes.
- To broaden the range of curriculum offerings available to students.

- To further develop and extend skills of staff working with target groups.
- To provide students and teachers in the Derwent schools with opportunities to work together.

- To forge a district partnership between Derwent High Schools and District High Schools in the delivery of authentic learning projects.
- To develop a sustainable district model for the above objectives.

Towards the end of 2003, recognising that the above list includes both objectives and strategies, a further draft clarifying these was circulated:

> The **Real Learning Real Futures Project** *offers a range of Programs at school sites across the Derwent District. They are designed to improve the learning outcomes for all students but in particular for those students at risk of disengaging from education, training and/or employment. Programs allow broader student options and focus on making the curriculum more interesting, more relevant and more meaningful. In this way all students benefit and our students 'at-risk' have a much better provision that does not isolate them from the mainstream.*
>
> ***Project Goals***
> - *increased student engagement with the curriculum;*
> - *increased student retention to completion of Year 12;*
> - *increased student attendance;*
> - *reduced suspension levels;*
> - *extended curriculum offerings that align with the Essential Learnings;*
> - *improved student learning outcomes.*

*Project Strategies*

- *work co-operatively and in partnership with District schools to extend curriculum offerings;*
- *provide students and teachers in Derwent District schools with opportunities to work together;*
- *establish a variety of Programs and interventions to meet the learning needs of students at-risk of disengaging from education, training and/or employment;*
- *Programs reflect student diversity and include some students at-risk;*
- *build partnerships with other agencies and services to create an effective, seamless student support network;*
- *assist schools to embed Programs in local context where appropriate;*
- *provide professional learning and teacher networking to extend the skills of staff working with students at risk.*

In addition, principals of the District High Schools emphasise the importance to their communities of having other students come to them for courses. For schools who are frequently portrayed in terms of 'deficits', it is extremely positive that they are now seen, through this Program, to have something special to offer the broader educational community.

## The Broader Context

The Program's approach is also in line with international best practice around education and health promotion. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has outlined a framework for describing levels of health intervention in schools and elsewhere. Within this framework, four levels of intervention in a whole-school approach are recognised and, though these were initially conceptualised with reference to health, they are also adaptable to be applied more broadly to any form of Program intervention within schools. Derwent Support Service has also explicitly used this model in conceptualising its 'continuum of support' for students in the District.

An outline is provided on the next page, and further details - originally drawn from a report on the MindMatters mental health education kit - are included in Appendix B (page 46).
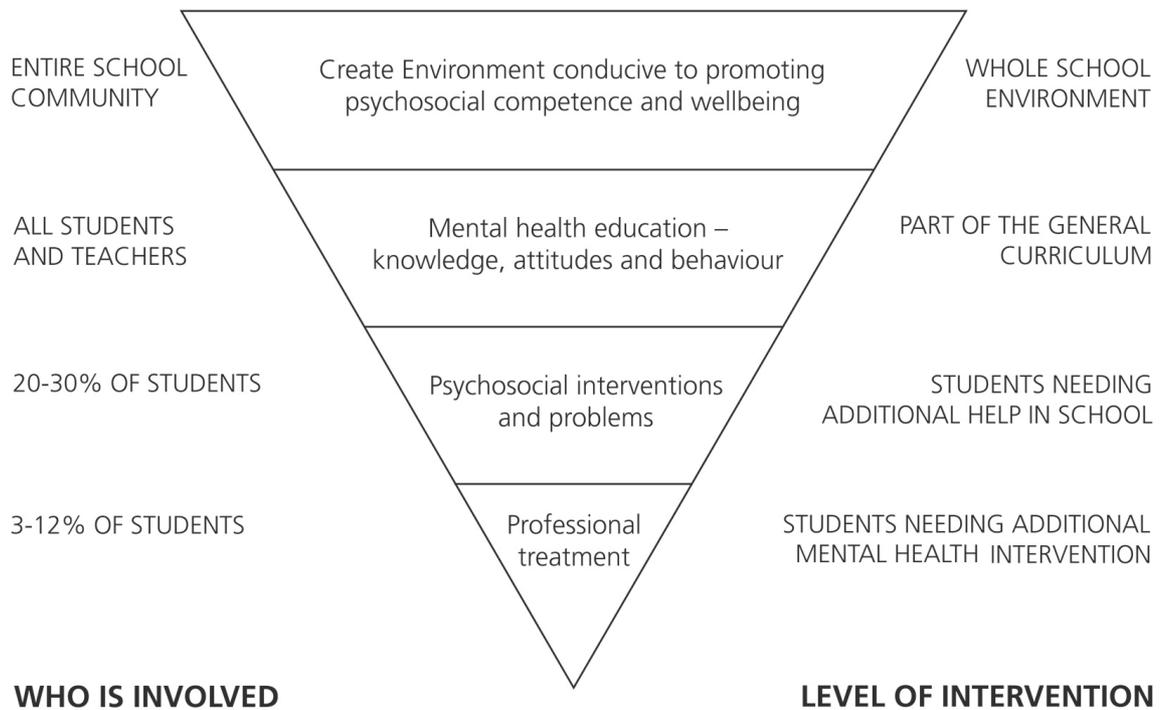
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ENTIRE SCHOOL          Create Environment conducive to promoting          WHOLE SCHOOL
COMMUNITY              psychosocial competence and wellbeing               ENVIRONMENT

ALL STUDENTS                    Mental health education –                  PART OF THE GENERAL
AND TEACHERS              knowledge, attitudes and behaviour               CURRICULUM

20-30% OF STUDENTS         Psychosocial interventions                      STUDENTS NEEDING
                                 and problems                         ADDITIONAL HELP IN SCHOOL

3-12% OF STUDENTS               Professional                      STUDENTS NEEDING ADDITIONAL
                                 treatment                         MENTAL HEALTH  INTERVENTION
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**WHO IS INVOLVED**                                                    **LEVEL OF INTERVENTION**

**School Environment**

The widest part of the triangle represents the emphasis that the whole school approach places on creating an environment that is 'health promoting' for all participants.  This layer involves the entire school community:  the quality of the relationships with parents, students and with community agencies, the school ethos, and the nature of school policies.

This framework encourages all teachers to see themselves as fostering a supportive social and learning environment, promoting resilience, self-esteem and social skills for all students, by offering a stimulating and challenging curriculum Program.  This first level is concerned with a conscious emphasis on maintaining a pro-social environment in every classroom and through school-wide activities.

**Primary Prevention**

The second level of the triangle depicts the provision of specific curriculum Programs designed to promote the development of communication, help-seeking and problem-solving skills.  This activity can be termed primary prevention as it aims to prevent or reduce the incidence of harmful or unhealthy attitudes or behaviours. It will entail all teachers promoting skills of communication and problem-solving and maintaining a sense of purpose and challenge in their ongoing Program.

Many of the approaches here utilise experiential and interactive teaching strategies designed to promote engagement, skills development and a sense of connectedness.  These activities can introduce a level of fun and vitality into the classroom and at the same time require students to cooperate and communicate in order to address the challenges inherent in the tasks.  Guided discussion is used to assist students to move from an experiential to a reflective mode and to find a language to talk about what it is to be human and to face change and challenge.

All students, including those 'at risk' or encountering specific life challenges, benefit from the provision of curriculum programs and the maintenance of a positive school ethos. RLRF provides a range of initiatives that are open to all students in the participating schools.

**Early Intervention**

The third level of the triangle indicates the need for school-based structures and Programs designed to identify and provide additional support for those students dealing with particular educational, social, emotional or health problems. This can be termed early recognition and intervention as it involves detecting a problem at an early stage and providing effective support. It includes reviewing the way in which schools identify students and intervene to refer and support them.

Targeted Programs, individual counselling, consultation with parents or referrals to outside agencies may be required to assist students requiring additional support at certain stages of their school life or in response to challenging life situations. In this situation, RLRF is developed to specifically target identified students and to provide appropriate educational activities within the broader provision of inclusive Programs.

**Assessment and Referral**

The fourth and final level of the triangle indicates the small percentage of students who require professional assessment or treatment for learning, behavioural or health problems. This level can involve referral and, in some instances, crisis management. The school can play a critical role in referring students and families dealing with a range of issues. Whilst this level of treatment is not usually provided by school personnel, the school will nonetheless play a role in referral and be required to continue to support the student undergoing treatment or to assist with reintegration into school life.

## 1.4 RLRF In Operation

**Overall Plan**

When initially planned, it was intended that the Program should have the following structure:

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│        CURRICULUM RENEWAL            │
│  Engaging with the Essential Learnings│
└─────────────────────────────────────┘

┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Engagement   Critical Thinking   Authentic Learning   Deeper Understanding │
└───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

          ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
          │  PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR STAFF   │
          └──────────────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐      ┌────────────────────┐
│ SISTER SCHOOLS│ ←→  │ INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS│ ←→  │ DISTRICT INITIATIVES│
└──────────────┘      └──────────────────┘      └────────────────────┘

                 ┌──────────────────────┐
                 │       PROJECTS        │
                 └──────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────┐  ┌────────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
│ Online Learning  │  │  Project Based Learning │  │ Work / Enterprise │
└──────────────────┘  └────────────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘
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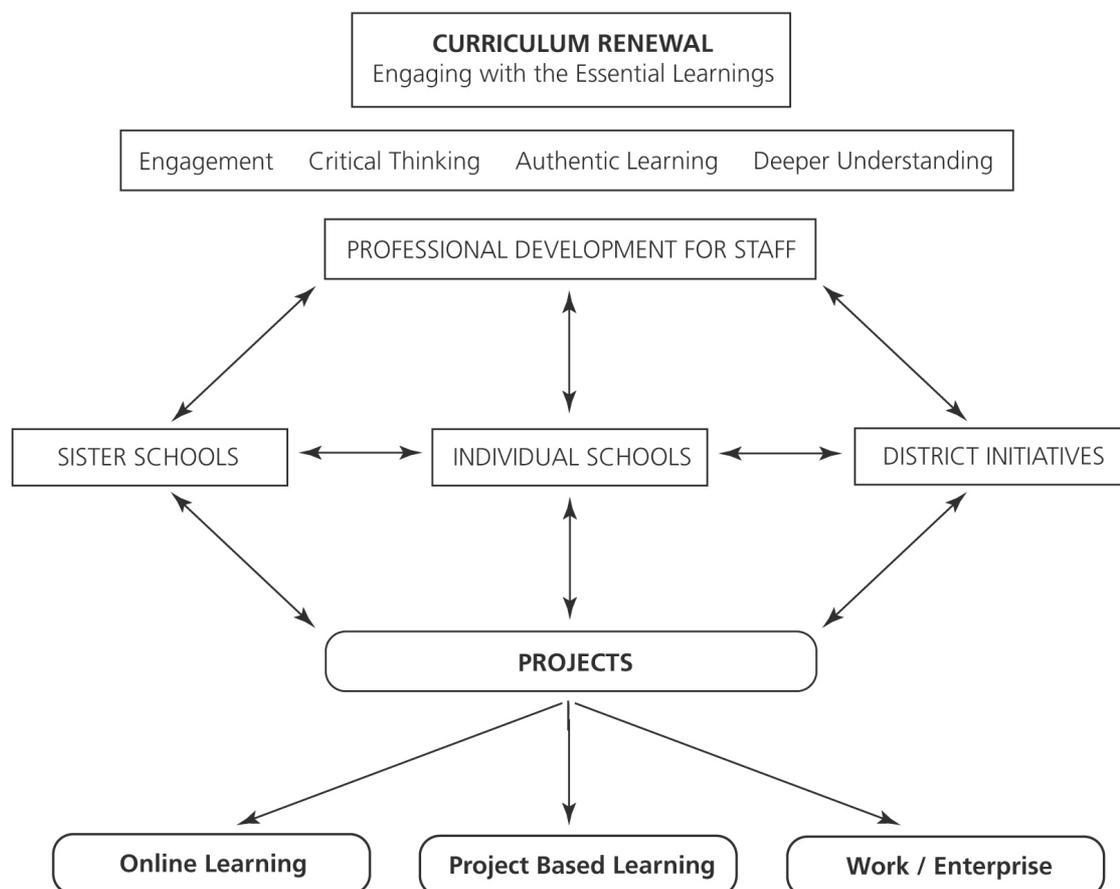
This project was planned to have three interlinked components:

- Project-Based Learning;
- Online Learning;
- Work/Enterprise.

These components were designed to reflect the Essential Learnings as developed within and by the Tasmanian Department of Education.

In operation, the first year of the Program has concentrated on the Project-Based Learning component. The Online Learning component is still in the process of development though is involved in some projects, while the Work/Enterprise component underpins and is incorporated within many of the approaches.

**Project-Based Learning**

The Program defines Project-Based Learning in the following terms:

> *Learning experiences which engage students in complex, real-world projects through which they develop and apply skills and knowledge. A strategy that recognises that significant learning taps students' inherent drive to learn, capability to do important work, and the need to be taken seriously. Learning in which results are not predetermined or fully predictable. Learning which requires students to draw from many information sources and disciplines in order to solve problems. Learning which requires students to coordinate time, work schedules and project outcomes in order to accomplish project goals on a predicted time schedule.*

This component is the particular focus of this report. It is a District-wide action research project being carried out by the schools to investigate the development of **Project-Based Learning** for Years 9 and 10. It was based on existing initiatives within these schools and District but is being taken further in its exploration of ideas of 'authentic curriculum'.[2] Through a range of approaches to engage students more meaningfully, these projects are aimed to improve retention and attendance. **Project-Based Learning** goes beyond experiential learning - the projects feature real learning, real outcomes and real deadlines.

Research indicates that students participating in authentic learning projects display higher engagement and motivation.[3]

**Online Learning**

The evolution of RLRF will involve Online Learning by students:

> *... the extension of an E-magine project already in place – Project-Based Learning Using Multimedia. ... Its main objective is to support teachers in the development and implementation of online Project-Based Learning modules in these schools. Through the provision of additional resources it is envisaged that this project can be extended to all project schools.*

> *Project-Based Learning is a learning pedagogy that reflects the way that learning takes place in the real world, in the work place and in everyday life, and as such, will assist in the development of key skills and understandings and engagement for students. Providing this on-line allows for enrichment of school curriculum, particularly for small schools, plus the development of ICT literacy and thus the engagement of students.*

> *Recent studies indicate the take up of technology in financially low socio-economic and/or geographically isolated areas is significantly lower than in advantaged urban situations. All Derwent schools fall into one or both of these disadvantaged categories. Supporting students via on-line learning can [contribute to] overcoming these poverty-based technological disadvantages.*

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[2] Darling-Hammond, L. (1995) *Authentic Assessment in Action: Studies of Schools and Students at Work* (with Ancess, J and Falk, B.), Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University: New York and London.

[3] For example: Newmann, F. M. and Associates (1996) *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, USA.

**Work / Enterprise**

A further linkage is made with Work/Enterprise Education.

*This project aims to broaden the opportunities students have to access real life experiences in the world of work, business, enterprise and community. These opportunities will be facilitated through the establishment of links and partnerships with key community organisations (eg, the Beacon Foundation, Red Cross, local governments). These opportunities will better prepare students for entry into VET Programs at the college level and the workforce.*

**Student Selection**

While specific attention is paid to the needs of students seen as 'at risk' by schools, it is important to RLRF that these projects involve a mixed group of students. This avoids Program stigmatisation, and also provides positive role modelling for active participation and commitment. The Program emphasises that their approaches are for all students:

*Projects such as creating multi media products, building a go-kart or restoring an old building have as much relevance for our more able students as they do for those who are 'at risk'… Our aim is to make our curriculum more interesting, more relevant and more meaningful by introducing the Project-Based Learning approach across the senior curriculum. In this way all of our students will benefit, but this will also provide a context where we make much better provision for our students 'at risk' without isolating them from the mainstream. This is a really significant point because, in our view, it is this 'connectedness', combined with resilience, that provides the glue for sustained attendance and a commitment to future learning.*

At a school level, Year 9 and Year 10 coordinators mainly carry out student selection. Usually, projects are advertised within the school, students express interest or formally apply, and co-ordinators select a mix of students for the available places. These coordinators determine an appropriate mix on the basis of students' interest (which might be career related) and specific student need – an assessment of the value of participation for certain students. In targeting projects to specific students through advocacy, suggestion and advice ('soft targeting'), teachers are using:

- **personal** (self-esteem) factors: assessing the likely benefit of the project for students' self-confidence, risk-taking and "going beyond what they've done";

- **relational** factors: assessing benefits in working with other students and adults, and meeting new people;

- **behavioural** factors: assessing the project's likely benefit in changing negative behaviour including school avoidance, conflict and so on;

- **academic** factors: assessing likely impact on boosting students' success in learning outcomes.

**Program Operation in 2003**

2003 has marked the first year of operation of the Real Learning Real Futures Program. The general model has been that of withdrawal of students from classes for participation in activities at one school or in a community location. Initially students were transported by parents and staff to project locations, but during the year a bus was purchased and a driver employed part-time. This means that projects can be operated throughout the District, throughout the week and throughout the year.

Some of these projects operate for a full day, one day a week for a short or an extended period; others operate within a block of time (eg for a solid week); others involve short 'classes' over several days.

In the first year, in addition to individual placements of 'at risk' students in community projects that took place through Derwent Student Service (they estimate 500 such placements), approximately 564 students from 12 schools took part in 13 RLRF projects (many of which were repeated several times) offered by the participating schools. This was a total of at least 710 RLRF placements (to November).

Each project specified the desirable or maximum number of students, and a preferred timetable structure. The number of places available for each of the schools in any one project is then determined on a pro rata basis, with the ability for schools to 'trade' places between projects.

Schools attempted to spread access across their Year 9 and 10 students, plus 'soft target' specific students to encourage their participation. This meant that at a larger school, approximately 12% of students had been involved in some way, while at a smaller school, all the students at the appropriate year level had been involved in at least one project. At the same time, some students who the schools identified as having specific needs, had been involved in more than one project. (Thus total number of placements exceeded total student numbers.)

The range of projects, their structure and length of operation are described in the following section.

## 1.5    Description of the Nature and Range of Experiences

The ten individual schools (including Derwent Support Service) both contribute curriculum resources and projects, and gain access for students to a greater variety of projects than they could offer individually. In developing possible courses and putting them forward as the school's contribution to the shared RLRF Program, one principal described a process in which the school surveys local resources and strengths. "We think: this might fit in with RLRF… We have in mind projects that are outside the academic stream, and which also provide a different audience for the outcomes of learning."

Some partnerships and curriculum offerings were already existing within individual schools and, through RLRF, become resources for the District. In other cases, personal contacts assist in the development of projects and the acquisition of or access to the resources needed to operate the projects.

Here are descriptions of the projects in operation during 2003. While most of these were in place at the start of the year, some developed during the year and were added to the list of available options at a later time.

### Project Descriptions

*Agriculture:  Bridgewater High School Farm*
Groups of students work at the Farm, carrying out general farm maintenance, animal husbandry and land care. This is essentially a hands-on experience. Students attend one day per week for 5 weeks with other individual options available.
(Students from 9 schools took part in 2003)

*Aquaculture*

In either one or two day projects, students learnt about Lake Dulverton as a fishing area and the development of the Central Tasmanian Aquaculture Centre. They looked at the different ways of structuring a fish farm and also the physical needs and anatomy of trout, learned fly tying and lure making and got to try fly fishing.
(Students from 8 schools)

*Aquatics Week Camp*

Two single-gender camps were held at Montrose Bay Yacht Club each for a period of one full week. Students went sailing, canoeing, rowing and scuba diving.
(Students from 8 schools)

*Artisans in Residence*

The two artisans are based at Cosgrove High School. They are a boat builder/model maker, and a sculptor/multi-materials designer-maker. This project enabled individual students to work alongside professional artists and also to watch how they work as they create the art through which they earn their living and run their own businesses. For example, with the boat builder, students worked in small groups to construct a dinghy or small yacht. They learnt about project planning and implementation, wooden construction and teamwork. These craft will be sold on completion to re-coup expenses. This ran for 2 hours, one day per week, for 20 weeks.
(Students from 3 schools)

*Bricklaying*

Students undertook an introductory course in bricklaying and got to build simple structures. These courses were each conducted over two full days.
(Students from 9 schools)

*Derwent Maritime Adventure*

This is an introductory course to sailing and the handling of small unpowered boats. The course combines practical training with basic theoretical components. It is offered as a complete one-week course, and operates in partnership with the Austin's Ferry Yacht Club.
(Students from 3 schools)

*Emergency Services*

Organised through Glenora District High School, this was a one week course where students learnt about first aid training, bush skills, how to do line searches, how to use a fire hose and extinguisher, bush fire awareness, how to carry out water searches and use flares, and air emergency services.
(Students from 9 schools)

*Holdens & Fords*

Students learnt car maintenance and repair work, by working on their own car with help from a professional mechanic and panel beater. The project runs for one full day a week for nine weeks.
(Students from 7 schools)

*Multimedia*

In several 9-week courses (for one day a week), students created their own multimedia projects, products and challenges. There was an initial workshop at E-magine and then students worked with a mentor.
(Students from 8 schools)

*Riverkeeper*

The Riverkeeper project involved marine activities that introduced students to issues of river health usually with a "adopt a patch" perspective. Activities included foreshore clean-up, basic first aid and occupational health & safety, marine emergency procedures, boat handling, study of eco-systems, and foreshore management. It has spawned the development of further community-based Programs (Deckhand Program; Frog Breeding Program) with students from specific schools. Students sat for and gained their powerboat driving licence (organised through Marine & Safety Tasmania). There were also possibilities for some students to continue in this area and gain certificate 1 deckhand (Fishing Industry Training Board). Apart from District High Schools, each school project ran over two consecutive days for five weeks catering for small groups. DHS projects operated as a "block" week project.
(Students from 10 schools)

*Robotics*

*Introduction to Robotics* is designed to provide a hands-on experience of robotics. Students learnt how to design and build their own robots using LEGO and to Program them using the ROBOLAB software. Along the way they undertook a series of challenges, including building robots to play robotic soccer and entering as a team in the Statewide RoboCup Junior competition. This project ran one day a week for the whole year.
(Students from 7 schools)

In addition to these projects, Derwent Support Service (DSS) continued to offer a range of community placements within this overall model, with funding from a variety of other sources. These operate closely in association with RLRF (and to some extent participation in the 'Natural Therapies' and 'Workplace Mentoring' projects are counted within RLRF statistics), but were not officially funded within it in 2003:

*Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Camps*

Two camps were conducted for Indigenous students, with enrolment through liaison with the Aboriginal Education Officer and DSS staff in schools. Each of the camps was for three days and aimed at strengthening community links and identity through engagement in cultural activities.

*Cosgrove Community Play Group*

Students interacted with parents and pre-school children and undertook a variety of activities with them, including: Painting, Play dough, Playing with toys, Craft activities, Dress-ups and Story telling. Each placement ran for a ten week block.

*Year 7/8 Farm Project*

There were opportunities for Year 7/8 students at risk to engage in a practical project at Bridgewater Farm. The project was for a day a week with students staying with the project for 6 weeks. Enrolment was through liaison with DSS staff in schools.

*Natural Therapies*

A practical course, with some hand out notes, was offered in Personal Fitness including Tai-Chi, Yoga and Relaxation therapies; Aromatherapy/reflexology/massage or shiatsu; Hair and skin care; Use of herbs – herbal teas, baths, herbal products; and Careers and courses in the area of Natural Therapies.
(Students from 5 schools)

*Pre Driver Awareness*

With a specific focus on young people over 15 years (possibly with literacy challenges or challenges attending school), a course provided opportunities to gain certification for their Drivers

Licence. Students learned for, and completed, the Learner Driver Test and the Pre Driver Awareness short course. Certification was given for both. Students were enrolled through liaison with DSS staff in schools. The project ran for 7 weeks (an hour session each week).

*Work Placement/Mentoring*

Individual students at risk negotiated a six week (one day a week) Work Placement through the Support Service in an area of the student's strongest interest – from panel beating, hair dressing and vet assistant to child care or apprentice jockey.
(Students from 9 schools)

**What Actually Happens?**

*Project Operation*

In reading these descriptions, and in observing the operation of the projects, we can see a mix of project types. Some of these projects offer students hands-on learning experiences. Others provide a 'taster' for future possible careers, or an opportunity to experience fun activities with other students, or an extension of students into experiences beyond those they had previously encountered. Some engage students with significant problem solving and production of community-level outcomes – the criteria for 'authentic learning'. Most projects have a mix of all these intentions and achieve them to a greater or lesser extent.

In its first year, the Program is still grappling with those issues: what is the appropriate mix of project intentions that will engage but also challenge students? HOW can projects become more authentic, more engaging, more challenging … more FUN?

This evaluation, at the end of the first year of operation, provides a focus for the Program to reflect on why it chooses particular activities, and what it wants these activities to achieve.

Beyond that first level, the Program also wants to have an impact on the nature of curriculum being offered within the participating schools: to broaden the concept of a 'mainstream' and to avoid the isolation of such approaches as 'alternative'. Initial signs are encouraging, with various participants noting that these activities were "not seen as that different".

However, schools are still being challenged to determine how, in both conceptual and organisational terms, the RLRF projects can be integrated with other curriculum Programs. This integration would provide complementary learning activities, avoid disruption of classes (eg when students are regularly withdrawn from classes), and would not cut students off from achieving successful outcomes across other subject areas.

*Student Mix*

The first impression of the students involved in the projects is one of a mixed group. When asked why they were there, "interest" featured most strongly in their responses, though a few were up-front in saying: "to get out of classes" or "because I don't like school".

We can also note that many Programs are relatively gender balanced. Having said that, there are also instances of some projects being more gender stereotyped. Holdens and Fords, and Boat Building were both all male when visited in October - though there was apparently one girl initially involved in the latter project, who then dropped out. Pressures to maintain stereotyping of activities are strong, and may be subtlety reinforced. But high activity Programs such as Emergency Services were conspicuously gender mixed, whether by student choice or spe-

cific teacher targeting. Some attempts were made to offer single gender activities, and while this was seen as logical for a week-long camp, girls resisted being 'singled out' in other activities for a 'girls Program'.

*Who gets referred and/or takes up these Programs?*

Teachers discussed difficulties involved in targeting students who would benefit most from these projects. In some instances, those who would benefit most, exhibited characteristics (around risk taking for example) that worked against their participation: they didn't choose when projects were offered, they were uninterested when encouraged, they didn't turn up when selected. How to maintain successful 'soft targeting' of specific students – without the projects becoming known as 'at risk' initiatives – continues to be an area for teacher reflection and learning.

Teachers also reflected that this situation was improving during the year, with a growth of a school culture or ethos that "having a go" was appropriate behaviour. In some cases, this was noted as a significant turn-round within the school. The Program was now located within an ethos that would reinforce a willingness to participate. It is yet to be seen whether this changed ethos will extend to significantly marginalised students.

*Across Schools*

Depending on what is counted as being formally within the RLRF Program, 11 to 13 projects were offered in 2003, some several times. Almost all involved mixed groups of students from the participating schools rather than single-school groups.

This mix of students was seen as highly valuable. Teachers commented that students were discouraged from 'posing' in front of school mates. Students commented that they valued meeting new people and making new friendships. There was both seriousness in students' focus, and an appreciation of the 'fun' or 'enjoyment' of the projects. The size of project groups also assisted here, with students identifying the value of being in groups of less than 12 students – and thus the ability to get more personal attention, and also to get to know others in the group as individuals.

On the other hand, several students indicated the initial importance of being with someone from their own school. One noted: "I looked round first to see who else was choosing to go. I wasn't going to be the only one."

While such attitudes may change as an ethos of participation becomes established, these first responses can disadvantage those schools with small populations and hence with, perhaps, only one allocated place within projects. These schools may 'trade' places to ensure that at least two students attend any one activity.

The operation of RLRF has also had a significant impact on inter-school cooperation, with a 'shared project' to be managed, formalising a commitment to District-wide collaboration. It places such collaboration within a very practical framework, which produces substantial benefits for each participating school.

## 1.6    The Pedagogy

Previously we noted that the projects included a range of operational intentions. These might be characterised as:

- active/hands on approaches:  students actually DO things rather than read, write or discuss them (which are seen as 'academic' activities);

- community linkages: projects are located within community settings, outside the school, and linked to other community groups;

- new pathways:  projects enable students to have new experiences, either of a general 'life-broadening' nature, or directed towards possible career/job areas;

- learning goals:  projects involve investigation, analysis and other forms of learning;

- productive outcomes:  students produce something of value both to themselves, and beyond themselves.

If we look at individual projects, we can see a complex mix of these, with some projects stressing some characteristics and being weaker on others. These characteristics may also vary over time and between groups of students, as projects respond to student needs and to planned or serendipitous opportunities.

The Program design emphasises a commitment to 'authentic learning', which involves:

- construction of knowledge:  analysing or interpreting information to solve a problem that can't be solved by information retrieval alone;

- disciplined inquiry:  a deep understanding of a problem or issue;

- aesthetic, utilitarian or personal value:  making connections to the world beyond the classroom, and having an impact on others.

It is clear that not all projects currently meet those criteria. Many are specifically focused on access to extended experience, or on encouraging productive group work, or on introducing specific skills. The Program is currently examining these project intentions, recognising the value of a coherent plan for what is offered, and seeking ways to encourage each project to become more 'authentic'.


## 1.7    Outcomes for Students

At the end of the first year of Program operation, there is widespread qualitative data on the success of this approach. Both teachers and students identify gains for individual students in confidence, enthusiasm, commitment and willingness to 'have a go'. Some schools point to increased student attendance, and some specifically required this for students to be selected for desirable projects.

As yet, no systematic data collection has been conducted around attendance, retention, behaviour or learning. Baseline data exists across the Region and it should be possible for the Program to conduct simple research and analysis of this information over the next few years. Such data collection and analysis requires a Program commitment over a substantial period: other school change literature indicates periods of three to five years as the minimum period for developing and assessing curriculum innovation.

However, within one year, the Program has gathered substantial 'case study' information that indicates both student and teacher satisfaction and also strongly positive outcomes for student commitment, behaviour and learning.

In addition, the Program is developing common forms of certification of participation and achievement. This will indicate what students have done and what skills have been developed, and will provide a 'record of development' within their graduate certification. It is important that such certification has parity within forms of State credentials, and this area is currently under review.

Here is one Program story supplied by a school (the student's name and identifying details have been changed):

> Alex is 15 years old. His attendance at school has been problematic from time to time and he has been clinically diagnosed as suffering from anxiety. He attended two RLRF courses in 2003 and says he enjoyed them both. His teachers and parents indicate that he seems much happier at school. He says this too, and attributes his new enjoyment of school directly to his participation in the Aquaculture and Emergency Services courses. He says he would like to be involved in five-day courses about once a month or once a term.
>
> While there are other factors that may have contributed to this improvement – counselling to assist with his anxiety, the strong support of his family, responsibility as a canteen worker at the school – both Alex and the school recognise the provision of and participation in the RLRF options as a strong contributor to his improved feelings of well being.

## 1.8    Project Management and Support

The RLRF Program is managed by a Board of Management consisting of five members selected by and from the principals (or nominees) from all high schools and district high schools in the Derwent District and the Manager of District Support Service, together with the District Superintendent, District Executive Officer and the District Youth Learning Officer.

Individual school projects are managed on the various sites by Key Teachers identified by the schools and linked with the Steering Committee.

Program funding is derived from the MARSS (Managing and Retaining Secondary Students at Risk) allocation to the District schools, which is pooled by agreement between these schools. Schools note that if this were divided up between the schools, "there would be very little for each school". In addition, the District provides further support (a "management factor") and also allocates the work of the District Youth Learning Officer who acts as Administrator and 'Executive Officer' to the Program.

The group of schools clearly identified that a strength in the development of the Program was the cooperative arrangement between the schools and the support of the District. "Not being directed from outside," said one principal when asked about what had contributed to the Program's success. "We are working through tensions that are solved internally." Another referred positively to the value of the decision to get the Program up and going and "sort out the

rest later", despite being initially sceptical of that approach. That has only been possible and positive because the Program has taken an overall 'action research' approach to its development in which a conscious decision to collect data and review Program operation will continually enable changes and refinements to be made.

# 2 | Options for RLRF

## 2.1 Intentions of Part 2

This part of the Report is addressed firstly to the RLRF schools. It provides and analyses some information gathered from participants during the visit in October, and presents some suggestions for future directions.

The intention here is to raise and discuss some issues that underpin the Program, some concerns expressed by participants, and some operational matters. In highlighting these, I am aware that I'm not providing specific answers to many of these operational questions. It would be presumptive of me to feel that I understand all the details and the diverse needs of 10 schools, from a glimpse of the Program's operation. Rather, I'm trying here to identify the issues and suggest some broad directions.

## 2.2 RLRF Concepts

The RLRF Program rests on three core concepts:

- targeting of the needs of 'at risk' students within the overall mixed nature of the student participants (the term 'at risk' is used here as short-hand for a wide variety of students who are not experiencing success in school, and for whom previous academic provisions were too narrow);

- the provision of 'authentic' learning approaches (recognising that a greater variety of experiential approaches are occurring – see the discussion below);

- cooperation between schools in Program provision.

We should note from the outset that students, teachers, principals and others are strongly supportive of the Program, committed to its continuation, and endorse these three core concepts as vital to its success. It is proposed that the Program needs continued funding and organisational commitment for a minimum period of three years to enable the 'action research' approach to assess the Program's impact on student learning, participation and behaviour. This support particularly recognises the value of Program coordination through the Youth Learning Officer position.

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**Recommendation: <u>Sustained Operation</u>**

The Real Learning Real Futures Program is strongly endorsed as a positive initiative within the District, addressing needs of all students, particularly those 'at risk'. The Program needs to have certainty of support and funding in order to continue. Specifically, the Program should seek a commitment of funding for a minimum period of three years in order to develop a planned operation across that time. Such funding commitment should involve both support for individual project operation and provision of coordination and development at a District level including continuation and allocation of the Youth Learning Officer position.

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I now want to raise some comments about each of the core concepts in turn. I recognise that the overall Program is still at an early stage and that the implementation of these concepts is still being 'worked through' in practice, and that what happens is constantly moving in time. However these are some of the issues that need to be addressed:

**Student Population**

The mix of students within the Program seems to be working well overall. Many of the students with whom I spoke (in the school-offered projects) do not seem to characterise the Program in any way as being a Program for 'at risk' students. On the contrary, many defined entry to the Program as being around their interests and strengths. A minority of the students did indicate that they were there because "I don't like school" or "I was muckin' around." (There may be differences here in approaches to some of the activities provided through Derwent Student Service, where individual students are specifically referred to participation on the basis of individual learning or behavioural needs.)

Secondly, teachers were clearly supportive of the mix, but were also aware of and focused on the intentions of the Program around 'at risk' students and could clearly identify the Program's impact upon these students. In fact, when asked about the Program's impact in general terms, teachers almost always focused on its impact on these students.

The mix of students – between schools and of differing abilities/attitudes – was seen positively by students and teachers in its contribution to social and learning outcomes. It was seen that participation in the Program pushed students beyond their comfort zones, encouraged them to take social and learning risks, and enabled them to leave prior behavioural approaches behind. "They don't feel the need to pose in front of their mates," commented one staff member.

Yet the way that this mix develops poses some issues for the Program.

Students are encouraged into the Program: an approach of 'soft targeting' occurs at schools, where options to join are thrown open to all, but certain students are approached and encouraged to join. Whether students take up the option depends on personal and social factors: students talked of looking round to see who else was going, of only agreeing to go if 'mates' went etc.

Teachers have also noted that some of those students most in need of participation (or for whom the projects would be most relevant) were also the students with lowest confidence to take such risks. Some of these were characterised as being 'apathetic' or 'fearful', while others were seen as not carrying through on commitments. Examples were given of students who agreed to attend, then pulled out at the last minute, or who 'slept in' and didn't make the bus. Alienation from school and from commitment – the very factors that these projects are addressing – was seen as a 'learned barrier' to participation in them. This frustrated teachers, who saw the value of the Program to these students, who had tried "all sorts of approaches", but who were finally saying "well, it's up to them". "Some wouldn't move to get involved if you gave them a million dollars," commented one teacher, "so we go on to the next level."

The danger of going down the path of delivering projects to those most willing, or those for whom outcomes are easiest, is that there is a loss of the focus on marginalised students, and those most in need miss out again.

On the other hand, schools reported an improvement around these issues of commitment with time, and suggested that the ethos/climate of the school with regard to risk-taking and to involvement in the RLRF Program in particular, is changing. "There's been a change of the cul-

ture," said one year coordinator. "Students are now prepared to go to other schools." Another school points out that some projects were initially under-subscribed by their students: "some would not go at the last minute", but that this had changed and that available places were now oversubscribed.

Those changes don't just happen: they are encouraged or discouraged by steps people take. For example, attitudes towards the acceptability of 'pulling out' are strongly influenced by the way that instances of this are handled. It would be valuable to share some strategies to ensure that soft targeting is effective and that the ethos of 'being willing to have a go' develops.

For example, it was reported that improvements in behaviour, attendance etc were noted at one school when these were required as **pre-conditions** for Program acceptance, that is, when the projects were offered as a 'reward' for improvements. "Students are working hard to stay out of trouble so they can meet the criteria for inclusion in projects." Is this a useful strategy? What happens when students who would benefit from a project, fail to meet these pre-conditions – which they may do if negative behaviour has been learnt and reinforced over a long period – and are then excluded from beneficial activities?

Further, choices are constrained by stereotyped perceptions. While projects are inclusive, and many are gender balanced, there are also some examples of gendered choices. In some cases, the dominance of boys interested in and undertaking some activities deters the enrolment of girls. In at least one case, the sole girl discontinued participation. On the other hand, girls are reported to resist overt attempts to establish single gender approaches. Again, it would be valuable to share strategies that encourage students to move outside gendered perceptions; perhaps this needs 'harder' targeting to ensure that a viable group of either male or female students is recruited.

These targeting issues are also contexted within decisions about how many of the students within a Year 9 and 10 cohort are enabled to participate. In small schools, there is a strong 'equity' consideration, with schools noting that it was important that ALL students were able to take part in something over the year. In other larger schools, this is less of an issue, with significant fractions of the Year levels participating, but clearly participation in projects not being available to all.


*Question: How do schools balance criteria of 'open for all' against targeting of specific students with needs for such projects?*

This will not be easy to answer, nor may lasting or universal solutions be found. Rather, it is a topic for continuing discussion, sharing, trial and reflection.

Finally, student choice to do a specific project is also constrained by their perceptions of the organisational implications of their participation. One boy said: "I was interested to do it (Robotics) but I pulled out after one day: it was too big a commitment to make for the whole year." I read that as commitment against other school-based commitments – the activity was still being seen as a 'disruption' of the norm and hence disposable. This issue will be picked up a little later. However, the way that a specific project is offered will have an impact on selection. (It also, of course, is closely related to the nature of the activity and the intended outcomes.)

**Project Type**

The overall Program intentions focus strongly on the nature of the specific projects being of-
fered as 'authentic' learning.  Yet when we look at the cluster of projects, we see a diversity of
activities, not all of which are 'authentic'.

To be 'authentic', the literature cited by the Program requires three clear criteria:

- **construction of knowledge**;

- **disciplined inquiry**;

- **aesthetic, utilitarian or personal value**.

To what extent does each project do this?  Is it important that they all do?

From brief observation and from project descriptions, it appears that some of these projects are
stronger than others in these regards.  Some projects are substantially 'experiential', where the
aspects of 'having a go', 'extending experience' and 'taking a risk' are much more dominant
than the above criteria.

In fact, it may be quite OK that there is such diversity, but this needs to be planned and speci-
fied.  It might be extremely advantageous to have that diversity to respond to the diverse needs
of the students; for some, the 'challenging experience' might be a first step towards participa-
tion in a more demanding and/or authentic project at a later stage.

It would be a useful first step for each of the projects to specify its overall objectives. This
doesn't mean that there must be specific knowledge or skill objectives; objectives relating to
broadening experience, working as a group and so on, may be equally valid.  But all projects
need to be able to specify what they aim to achieve if the overall Program is to be able to
specify what it is doing and to understand what it is achieving.

So it is suggested that projects can be classified in relation to several sets of criteria:  around
their **process of operation,** around their **outcome objectives** and around their **authenticity of
outcomes**.

We might be able to see **process criteria** - 'how' projects operate - as including (and these lists are subject to further discussion, debate and decision):

- active/hands-on;
- clear specification of learning goals;
- community-linked – based in or with the wider community;
- inclusive - of ability etc;
- participatory – students taking part in decision-making;
- cooperative - operating in small groups and developing social skills;
- challenging – meeting new people and new experiences.

Secondly, we could classify projects according to their broader objectives - and these categories may overlap, with individual projects including several of these **criteria for objectives**:

- Personal/social extension – projects that mix and challenge students within a personal dimension;
- Experience extension – projects that introduce students to new experiences or to experiences that they would not have access to (cost, location etc);
- Career oriented – projects that provide a taster for possible careers, or open up training or employment options;
- Skill oriented – projects that increase specific student skills.

Thirdly, we could classify projects as to the degree to which they meet the above criteria for authenticity:

- **construction of knowledge:** analysing or interpreting information to solve a problem that can't be solved by information retrieval along;
- **disciplined inquiry:** a deep understanding of a problem or issue;
- **aesthetic, utilitarian or personal value:** making connections to the world beyond the classroom, and having an impact on others.

Then we can look at the **coherence** of a set of projects, in which RLRF looks not just at what a school has the capacity to offer, but specifically at what **sort** of project is **needed** to be offered within the mix. Across each of these criteria areas, the Program could characterise its projects as 'weak' to 'strong', and seek opportunities to both ensure an appropriate mix, and to challenge projects to become 'stronger' in their operation.

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**Recommendation: <u>Range of Activities</u>**

The Program needs to clarify its expectations about the nature of the activities offered, in order to have a coherent and planned mix of activities.

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**Recommendation: <u>Program Objectives</u>**

Each project should be asked to specify its learning and social objectives within the overall Program objectives. Both the nature of the activities and the outcomes (skills, credential etc) need to be clearer for students.

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*Authenticity*

Authenticity is then more than a reference to being activity-based. Authenticity implies decision-making (construction of knowledge), inquiry (learning) and (most importantly) purpose. So adoption of a statement about 'authentic' learning is both **limiting** (of what the Program can choose) and also **liberating** (in that the Program can construct other activities such as community research that may be less costly in terms of material, but still productive in terms of community development).

Tensions exist within the practice of 'authenticity'. For example, with the bricklaying project, the activity was highly skill-oriented – but students did not create anything lasting. With a short period of time, the focus was on skill training, rather than initially on the 'authentic' task. Students commented that the initial part was 'boring', but later saw the point and strongly defended the value of the activity. However, the brevity of the 'introduction' constrained the activity from becoming more 'authentic' and from actually creating some useful community outcome. If projects are to become more authentic, the Program needs to consider how they are structured and enabled to do that.

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**Recommendation:  <u>Authentic Learning</u>**

The Program needs to develop increased opportunities for authentic learning within the range of Program offerings. Each activity should be supported to develop outcomes that enable students to have an impact on their communities beyond the classroom.

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*Relationships of Trust and Responsibility*

Behind all of these discussions about activity processes also sits an issue about the way in which students are treated in these projects. Students frequently highlighted the value of these projects in relationship to trust and responsibility. They saw the informality of relationships – but also their authenticity (in how they were treated by workers) – as a strongly attractive aspect.

Nancy Phillips refers to three core aspects in the development of self-concept: **sense of meaning, sense of power, sense of bonding.**[4] These remain key touchstones of these project approaches. Unless students know that they are given real responsibilities – for something that is significant and authentic – these approaches are, in essence, no different to ones that students have previously rejected.

**Inter-school Cooperation**

The range of activities being offered within the Program could only be economically offered with inter-school cooperation. I've referred above to the positive outcomes of this for students, in working in groups that cut across school and friendship groups and the concentration on activity etc. Also, there have been various references by personnel from smaller and more remote District High Schools as to the positive benefits of inter-school projects in showing their stu-

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[4]  Phillips, N. (1990) 'Wellness During Childhood/Adolescent Development' in *Prevention Forum*, Vol 10, Issue 4, July 1990.

dents and communities that they have something to **offer** – that other students will come to them for activities.

This cooperation also has strong benefits for cooperative curriculum development within the District. It lays the basis for sharing pedagogical approaches, and for the development of exciting school and curriculum change.

It also, however, provides some significant challenges. Not the least is the organisational complexity of operating the projects across ten or more sites and of coordinating transport. And associated with this is the organisational **cost** of the Program: it requires resources over and above those involved with the individual projects – human (someone to do the organising; someone to drive the bus) and financial (principally transport costs, but also costs associated with the provision of specific activities). While Program sustainability depends on the capacity of individual schools to offer their own projects (and get access to other projects for their students), it also depends on 'cluster funding' to sustain the Program's infrastructure.

The Program needs to be able to point to significant outcomes for students to ensure that this support continues.

## 2.3 Outcomes

This evaluation has drawn on comments from students and teachers to point to substantial positive outcomes from and for RLRF on several levels:

**For students:**

- **Attitudinal**: students and teachers point to increased commitment, enthusiasm, confidence, and challenge (out of comfort zone/insularity) for individual students. They point to the value of broadened experience in development of 'life skills', and a chance to do different things or things that they "don't get a chance to do normally".

  Several comments were provided along the lines that participation had "turned the student round" or that "half a dozen students have made huge progress". Specific stories are told about the impact on individual students and about the way that changes in behaviour while at the activities has spilled over positively into other areas of the school and into other behaviour (see the story of Alex in Part 1).

- **Social**: students in particular strongly identify outcomes of fun, enjoyment, extension of friendship circles, "meeting new people and making new friends", and developing contacts as important outcomes. Many of these are associated with increases to and extension of social capital within these communities.

- **Skills**: teachers and students identify students' development of new skills, and the application of skills in real situations as Program outcomes: "it'll help us in later life".

- **Taster**: while students are ambivalent about whether they see themselves as continuing careers within the focus areas, they also imply the value of these experiences in exploring possibilities for future options.

#### For teachers:

- Some teachers identified '**respite**' from 'at risk' students as an advantage for them. More broadly, they talked of changes in commitment and behaviour of students as positive for their work within classrooms.

- The operation of these projects also provide **pedagogical challenges** for teachers, both in reflection on learning approaches, and also in adapting to students being out of classes. While they raise significant difficulties in this area, they also imply that these are positive challenges that inspire them.

#### For schools:

- The RLRF Program provides schools with specific areas of **curriculum extension** that they would be unable to offer by themselves.

- As for individual teachers, schools are also challenged to look at their overall **curriculum offerings and structure** in light of RLRF and determine their appropriateness.

#### For parents:

- While parents were not interviewed or surveyed as part of this review, there is second-hand information about their support for the Program. One school notes that it is significant that parents are "not resisting having their student go out to these activities".

- In particular, parents initially provided direct practical support by driving students to a central collection point for transport to projects. (This has been less necessary with the purchase of the bus.)

- Schools also relate positive stories of parental support and encouragement, and of parents reporting positively on outcomes for their children.

### Need for More Systematic Data Collection

However, these comments and stories need to be complemented by information about specific changes within the target group. While we may be able to hear and analyse stories of individual development, we need also to be able to point to improvements in the indicators that led to the Program development. Two areas in particular could be noted:

- the Program notes District figures for suspension, retention and participation. It would be useful to monitor these figures over several years (I would suggest a minimum of three to five years) to determine whether the Program's operation is associated with any changes here;

- the Program notes that "each school has targeted a group of 'at risk' students using participation/engagement indicators (attendance, literacy, behaviour etc)". It would be useful in a shorter time frame (eg during 2004) to develop a systematised approach to collecting data about the behaviour of at least a sample of these students. This would mean maintaining and examining attendance records, and supplementing these by some structured case studies.

> **Recommendation:  Data Collection**
>
> A systematised collection of information about the Program impact should be carried out over the next 1-3 years.  This could involve sample data collection around attendance, behaviour and so on at a school level, and also overall analysis of suspension and retention data at a District level.

## 2.4     Challenges for RLRF and Individual Schools

While we pointed out the outcomes of the Program for students, teachers and schools, there are also substantial challenges if RLRF is to be sustained.  That sustainability needs to occur on two levels:

• Sustainable within the operation of the individual schools;

• Sustainable between schools (operational and financial issues).

Within individual schools, the largest challenge is about how to ensure that RLRF projects are an integral part of school Programs – to be seen as **part** of the curriculum, alongside academic areas – rather than added (or as one person said: 'bolted') on.

This is not just a problem/issue for RLRF, as it is being reflected nationally:  At recent education conferences, for example, there has been substantial discussion about how the 'real learning opportunities' that are marginalised around the untouched core of the KLAs, can be moved to the centre of the curriculum.

Unless these issues are faced, we will continue to experience the impact of RLRF as dislocation and disruption.  There is already concern from teachers about the impact of students missing classes for RLRF activities.  While local solutions are developed (students catch up set work, or 'negotiated exemptions' are recognised), these leave the structure of the rest of the curriculum untouched and can be 'band-aid' solutions.

How larger solutions are implemented will vary from school to school.  The most positive signs exist within schools that are, in parallel with RLRF, examining and adapting their own curriculum along similar lines.  For example, the more radical restructuring of 'Make It Real; Make It Work' provides a timetabled space within which RLRF can exist.  In another example, the timetabling of short/school-based courses in parallel with RLRF enables disruption to be minimised.

All these solutions however, require adequate pre-planning and knowledge about RLRF options well in advance.  They become an element of timetable planning, not a cause for minimising disruption.

This then has implications for the RLRF projects to be seen in terms of their specification of learning outcomes etc – so that both teachers and students undertaking these projects can see where those learnings are located within students' overall development.

Such specification also means that the Program (as indicated earlier) may recognise that:

- there is a range of these goals within the Program's mix;
- individual projects need time and support to specify curriculum, goals, and intentions and link these to the Essential Learnings framework;
- goals should include development of group work skills, taking responsibility etc;
- there needs to be a clear specification of project activity plans; and
- projects accept that, while experience is important, it is not enough.

Such a project by project (as discussed earlier), and school by school (as discussed here) review of curriculum intentions and structures would lay a firm foundation for solution to some of the organisational issues discussed in the next section.

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**Recommendation:  <u>Curriculum Location</u>**

Each participating school should be asked to develop plans for the location of RLRF within its curriculum offerings in order to recognise it as part of, not added on to, the curriculum.  Such location should also recognise how the form of activities within RLRF can be structured with the school's timetable in order to minimise disadvantage to student participants.

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It is also important that the process of reflection be extended to students within the Program. Perhaps it was a response to an 'outsider', but many (certainly those characterised as being most 'at risk') find it difficult to articulate what it is that they have gained from participation, or what were important characteristics of projects.  I suspect this is not because they haven't got views on these matters, but rather that they are un-used to expressing and communicating these. If these projects are to play a role in addressing the Essential Learnings, particularly around 'thinking about thinking', every opportunity needs to be provided for students to reflect individually or collectively about their participation, and to build skills and experience in this area.

Three possible examples occur to me immediately, which build on the 'authentic curriculum' aspects of the Program:

- develop opportunities for students to represent the Program or projects to others:  they should at least be formally briefing the next group of students as to what the projects were about, and other options for talking about the Program to others should be seized or manufactured;
- create a regular (annual?) student reflection forum that brings together students from the various projects to present their outcomes to each other and to others.  This would serve as celebration, information and reflection: inter-school student workshops would be asked to define what it was about the projects that made them successful for example;
- build processes of Program and project documentation into some of the specific projects eg Multi Media students could, as one or part of their project, make an on-line report on some or all other projects for use within individual schools or even for local media.

It is important that those students most in need of reflection and of confidence in expression be specifically targeted and supported to be Program representatives.

## 2.5    Operational Matters

Program participants raised various operational matters.  It is emphasised that there is a tendency to focus on solving these first; but I'm arguing that many are symptoms of and follow on from the broader issues previously canvassed, and need to be eventually dealt with within that broader framework.

**Issues Within Individual Schools**

While there is strong support for the Program from the participating schools, there are concerns that are being sorted out or need to be sorted out.

First, there are concerns from some staff about the Program's impact on their classes (particularly in core areas), with students missing substantial sessions, needing to catch up work, or being at risk of failure.  Students are also concerned about the pressure that 'catching up' places on them, though teachers – recognising the broader benefits – appear more relaxed about this.  However students in one discussion rated 'missing work' as a serious worry, though all felt they could 'catch up' in other school time.  They suggested a 'work parcel' they could take with them to their course/activity, though this tends to reinforce the centrality of the 'normal' curriculum and the marginality of other activities.

If, as these students say, the projects have a place in the 'regular curriculum', and are important because "we are learning", how can schools recognise and structure this breadth of learning within the timetabled curriculum?  While there is a general commitment to make the options and opportunities provided by RLRF happen for students, teachers are asking about the current 'withdrawal' arrangements:  "How can we do it better?"  "How can we handle disruption to our Programs?"

It was suggested that part of the answer is better communication of planning.  Some teachers were concerned that they did not know in advance when students would be absent.  Therefore they couldn't plan to adapt class lessons to cover this.  "If I knew who was going to be out in advance, I could work around it and set alternative tasks".

Staff at all levels need to be brought into more active sharing and reflective roles within the Program – and this, in turn, will maintain strong Program understanding and ownership across the schools.  There is much to be learnt; there is much to be invented.  How are different schools approaching student selection?  What strategies are portable to other schools?  What pedagogical approaches have been found to be effective?  How can teachers and non-teachers within the Program, share perspectives and ideas on how to work with students?  What are the implications from RLRF for other areas of learning within the schools?

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**Recommendation:  Reflection and Shared Ownership**

Time for reflection needs to be provided for all staff involved at school and Program levels.  It is suggested that approximately a half a day per term be allocated across the District when all appropriate staff are able to get together to report, reflect and plan about RLRF operations.

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Such regular opportunities provided within and between each school for collaborative planning and communication of RLRF activities, would encourage discussion of their impact on other learning activities: Who will be out of classes? When? How do we deal with this?

However, there are large issues here to do with curriculum and learning **parity**. RLRF activities were in most cases imposed over an existing timetable structure, with students withdrawn from 'regular' classes for activities. In this context, responses are individualised (how do we deal with this student's absence?) rather than systematised (how do we structure opportunities for a variety of activities at this time?).

This implies the need for substantial advance planning, and as little 'new' activities to arise during the year as possible. While it would be useful to build as much flexibility into RLRF offerings as possible (eg being able to accommodate a new type of activity which suddenly became available during the year) we may need to recognise that this could only be offered if it was able to be structured within existing pre-planned arrangements. "We need to know a term ahead," said one teacher, "so we can do pre-planning."

Part of the value of such pre-planning is also that students would know about proposed activities and have enough information about them in order to make considered decisions and pre-plan their own involvement. Many of the students with whom I spoke said they only had a rough outline of what a particular activity was about, or didn't know what other options might develop later. In at least one case, a student said that he would not have chosen to be part of one activity if he'd known that another would be offered … and he was subsequently unable to take this option because the school was committed to 'sharing places around'. Other students spoke of the need for the criteria for participation in courses/activities to be made clearer to them. Perhaps some specification of 'what you will get from this' course – that is, a sharing of course objectives with students – would be beneficial. As noted earlier, it would be consonant with Program objectives to encourage previous students to have a strong and responsible role in this information transmission.

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**Recommendation: Forward Planning**

RLRF should develop clear forward planning of the nature and timing of its activities, so that both students and staff know what is offered in advance. There needs to be clear communication of what is available to students and staff. Student selection should involve counselling about the implications of undertaking RLRF activities for access to other curriculum areas. Students need to have confidence in an organised Program and also confidence in organised projects.

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**Issues Between Schools**

Program organisational concerns have been raised in the areas of:

- *Structure of activities:* queries have been raised about the balance between travel time and project time. This has restricted some schools' access to some offerings: it's not economical to travel 2-3 hours each way for a two-hour session. On the other hand, some activities may not be able to be offered in full-day sessions.

- *Transport:* concern has been expressed about the efficiency of running the bus when there are relatively few students involved. Some of this may be due to students not turning up,

but other instances will be more predictable. It may be possible to 'trade' buses between schools, with mini-buses being used within RLRF for some smaller projects, freeing the bus for other District uses.

- *Common time:* is it possible (or even desirable) to seek a common RLRF day? While this might simplify timetabling arrangements within the schools (RLRF could be 'restricted' to one time) I suspect that practicalities of travel and of when community agencies are available to offer activities would make this impossible. Simply put, it would not be possible to move all participating students to all RLRF locations if these were concentrated within one time-slot. On the other hand, it might be useful to agree on and define, across all schools, RLRF 'bands of time' during the week, during which most activities occur – and make these operate regularly across the year.

  *Suggestion:* How about getting school time-tablers together late in each year to see what common solutions are possible?

- *Common expectations:* the Management Group has specified detailed commitments about behaviour responsibilities (see Appendix A), and it is interesting to note that these have apparently not been required in practice. However other protocols about expectations of students from different schools while on a particular campus may be needed. As it is likely that the activities will not fit neatly with timetabled breaks etc these could address issues such as student movement around the schools, issuing students with identity cards or passes, use of canteens etc.

**Overall Program Issues**

Schools have raised issues about the impact of specific project structures on both students' access to activities and to the 'positioning' of RLRF within schools' timetables. These issues are raised more as questions than as proposals for action:

What is the impact of various structures (week long 'intensive' block courses versus spaced out year-long courses; short time allocation versus substantial allocation):

- **on students and their participation**: some students suggested strongly that courses should be longer, but others resiled from substantial commitments (especially if there were clashes with other classes);

- **on learning**: what development of learning is possible within short courses? Do some activities require longer time frames to develop skills in order to become more 'authentic'?

- **on school structures and access of students**: what is the impact of these different formats on the ability of schools to integrate activities with minimal disruption?

- **on the Program**: how are organisational matters such as transport, arrangement of community resources and tracking of students affected by different project structures?

Secondly, students and project providers have clearly identified the benefits involved with small numbers of students within the projects. However, small groups may be relatively uneconomical to operate (transport issues have already been mentioned) and to staff unless there are significant extra community-based resources allocated. Further, there is value in recognising that social objectives are important for students: learning about operating and cooperating within groups.

**Certification of Students**

It is unclear what form of certification is currently in place. When asked about what students took away from their projects, little was mentioned although some referred to the gaining of the boating licence from the Riverkeeper Project and/or the Derwent Maritime Adventures course, and others talked of possibilities of subsequently entering into Certificate I studies in specific areas.

District certification would carry some weight and emphasise the importance of the projects. Such certification would add to students' record of development, provide a component of a graduate certificate, and encourage a flow-on to further studies. Such a certificate would need to tie in with other school credentials, and be recognised as equally valid.

The Program needs to determine whether such certification would be of participation (and hence widely available) or of achievements (and hence tied to skills and/or completion of objectives – and perhaps not given to all students). There has been recent discussion of these issues by ANTA within the context of certification of youth development programs and this should be discussed within the Program.

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**Recommendation:  Certification**

Some form of common certification of participation in RLRF should be developed across all schools and across all projects. Such certification needs to have appropriate parity with other learning activities within the schools.

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## 2.6   Directions

From this discussion, there are several recommendations for Program directions. These have been located throughout the second part of this report, but are summarised here:

**Recommendation 1:  Sustained Operation**

The Real Learning Real Futures Program is strongly endorsed as a positive initiative within the District, addressing needs of all students, particularly those 'at risk'. The Program needs to have certainty of support and funding in order to continue. Specifically, the Program should seek a commitment of funding for a minimum period of 3 years in order to develop a planned operation across that time. Such funding commitment should involve both support for individual project operation and provision of coordination and development at a District level including continuation and allocation of the Youth Learning Officer position.

**Recommendation 2:  Student Cohort**

The mix of students within the Program should continue, with specific attention paid to targeting participation by those most in need. The addressing of 'at risk' within 'mainstream' offerings is a positive and important aspect of the Program. The Program needs to develop and share specific school-level approaches to targeting in order to maximise participation in the Program by those most in needs – and by those presently most resistant to becoming involved.

**Recommendation 3:  Range of Activities**

The Program needs to clarify its expectations about the nature of the activities offered within the Program, in order to have a coherent and planned mix of activities.

**Recommendation 4:  Program Objectives**

Each project should be asked to specify its learning and social objectives within the overall Program objectives.  Both the nature of the activities and the outcomes (skills, credential etc) need to be clearer for students.

**Recommendation 5:  Authentic Learning**

The Program needs to develop increased opportunities for authentic learning within the range of Program offerings.  Each activity should be supported to develop outcomes that enable students to have an impact on their communities beyond the classroom.

**Recommendation 6:  Certification**

Some form of common certification of participation in RLRF should be developed across all schools and across all projects.  Such certification needs to have appropriate parity with other learning activities within the schools.

**Recommendation 7:  Curriculum Location**

Each participating school should be asked to develop plans for the location of RLRF within its curriculum offerings in order to recognise it as part of, not added on to, the curriculum.  Such location should also recognise how the form of activities within RLRF can be structured with the school's timetable in order to minimise disadvantage to student participants.

**Recommendation 8:  Forward Planning**

RLRF should develop clear forward planning of the nature and timing of its activities, so that both students and staff know what is offered in advance.  There needs to be clear communication of what is available to students and staff.  Student selection should involve counselling about implications of undertaking RLRF activities for access to other curriculum areas.  Students need to have confidence in an organised Program.

**Recommendation 9:  Reflection and Shared Ownership**

Time for reflection needs to be provided for all staff involved at school and Program levels.  It is suggested that approximately a half a day per term be allocated across the District when all appropriate staff are able to get together to report, reflect and plan about RLRF operations.

**Recommendation 10:  Data Collection**

A systematised collection of information about the Program impact should be carried out over the next 1-3 years.  This could involve sample data collection around attendance, behaviour and so on at a school level, and also overall analysis of suspension and retention data at a District level.

# 3 | Implications for Other Schools

There are many current examples of 'alternatives' in education – but most of these involve identifying and separating out students who are seen as not achieving success.  Most of these alternatives do not initially involve positive choices for these young people – even if the longer-term outcomes are positive for them.  The simple act of referring a young person to an 'alternative program' says something about that person, and the impact of that identification on the young person needs to be carefully considered.

Some of these 'alternative education' examples involve groups of schools combining funding and other resources to set up a unit that provides learning activities that are seen as more relevant to the needs of participants.  Some of these examples are regarded (by participants and the base schools) as providing a 'respite' for schools or students, or aim to provide students with skills (learning skills, behavioural skills and appropriate attitudes) before returning them to 'mainstream' settings.

Over many years, various criticisms have been made of such models: they focus on behavioural characteristics of individuals - particularly in a deficit mode; they focus on 'fixing' students; the situations and approaches within schools remain un-touched (in the worst of cases, students are returned to an unchanged situation that has contributed to the 'problem'); they disconnect students from the broad range of on-going options – they are 'dead-end' courses; they concentrate students with 'problems' in isolation from other students; and on a broader canvas, they marginalise structural solutions as 'alternative' to an unchanging 'mainstream'.

On the other hand, such 'alternatives' have enabled resources to be targeted to students most in need; have established different forms of student-adult and student-student relationships; have been flexible in content and approach and thus more likely to be responsive to students' needs; and have enabled different and innovative approaches to be tried that have, over a longer term, influenced 'mainstream' practices.

In this report on the Real Learning Real Futures Program, we have documented a different approach – one in which a group of schools combines to provide joint activities that are both targeted and inclusive; that connect to future learning and development; that are continuous with and part of the schools' overall curriculum.

It is always difficult to advance a model of practice.  There is a danger in attempting to transplant one success to a different context:  circumstances will be substantially different; the process of 'getting there' (that is, of thinking through appropriate responses) is as important as (or more so than) the destination.  Further, there is the difficulty that any example of practice that is self-reflective and developing, will be 'imperfect' and necessarily focusing on areas where improvement is needed.  Thus it will always be open to the challenge:  "There are problems there!"

However, we can also identify principles that underlie existing practices, and that provide 'touchstones' for others to consider.  Here there are three important principles that can inform the arguments, planning and implementation of other schools:

- **The inclusive nature of the student cohort**

    Here 'inclusion' means that a special effort is made to **include those students previously excluded** from access to success.  Students are not separated from others within the Program, but a 'mixed group' is formed according to interest and need.  However, schools

maintain a specific and rigorous focus on ensuring that those students previously excluded, get to participate and achieve success here. They do that through structuring the nature of activities to be appropriate to needs, and through provision of support and encouragement for individual students;

- **The applied nature of the activities**

    A set of activities is designed to meet the needs of the student cohort, which involves:
    – hands-on learning;
    – authentic learning (including grappling with what this means in practice);
    – learning that opens on-going opportunities.

- **A group of schools cooperating together, with a shared vision and trust**

    All schools contribute to and gain from the Program. They share a common approach, adopt a cooperative framework and gain benefits greater than they would from their separate contributions.

However it needs also to be recognised that there is a need for assured resourcing for such an approach. Cooperation and collaboration is not a matter of cost-saving; rather, to achieve effective work between these schools, there has been both a pooling of existing resources and the allocation of funding to coordination mechanisms: someone to administer the group, transport, project resources. To some extent this has involved a re-arrangement of existing and separate funding in a way that makes its allocation more effective and efficient. The role of the District in providing that coordination, in approving that re-arrangement, and of adding District resources is vital to the success of a group project.

Assurances about funding also need to be provided over a substantial time period. The changes to curriculum within individual schools as well as the operation of an inter-school Program takes time to develop. A commitment of support for at least a three to five year period is vital, as is a recognition that the Program will develop and change over that time.

In this way, an agreement to regard the development of a Program as action research underpins the lessons and successes of the Program. This means:

- shared identification of needs;

- the development of proposals to respond to these needs;

- a willingness to initiate action and commit resources to it;

- a commitment to data collection;

- an honesty in data analysis, reflection on progress and barriers, and modification of directions.

These are the continuing lessons of good practice. The Real Learning Real Futures Program provides a concrete example of this in operation. Their successes as well as their struggles inform possibilities for substantial practical directions in 'alternative education'.

## Program Documentation

**a.** **Extracts of Issues arising from RLRF Steering Committee Meeting; 6 December 2002**

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**Process to be established for the management of school entitlements – and procedure for the management of the overflow.**

**The following processes will be followed:**

1. Each school will have one place per project.

2. Remaining places will be distributed on a per capita % basis, based on Year 9/10 enrolments.

   - Rosetta 27%

   - Bridgewater 19%

   - Claremont 14%

   - New Norfolk 14%

   - Cosgrove 11%

   - Oatlands 7%

   - Glenora 5%

   - Bothwell 2%

   - Ouse 1%

3. Schools will have the flexibility to trade places across projects.

4. Schools can also cash-up a placement through negotiation with the Executive Officer (eg. Convert two 0.5s to 1.0).

5. Allocations across the broader Program will be made by the Executive Officer.

6. So, if a project has 20 student places…the makeup would be:

   - Each school has one place.

   - Then, the remaining 11 places would be divided:

     – Rosetta 3

     – Bridgewater 2

     – Claremont 1.5

     – New Norfolk 1.5

     – Cosgrove 1

     – Oatlands 0.75

     – Glenora 0.75

     – Bothwell 0.25

     – Ouse 0.25

**So, the total project enrolment would look like:**

- Rosetta 4 places

- Bridgewater 3 places

- Claremont 2 places, with .5 to trade

- New Norfolk 2 places, with .5 to trade

- Cosgrove 2 places

- Oatlands 1 place, with .75 to trade

- Glenora 1 place, with .75 to trade

- Bothwell 1 place, with .25 to trade

- Ouse 1 place, with .25 to trade

…

**There will be four enrolment deadlines**

- Quarter 1 – February 21$^{st}$ 2003 (Robotics and Multimedia numbers to the Executive Officer by 19$^{th}$ December 2002)

- Quarter 2 – April 4$^{th}$, 2003 (commencement after Easter break)

- Quarter 3 – June 26$^{th}$, 2003 (commencement 14$^{th}$ July)

- Quarter 4 – August 22$^{nd}$, 2003 (commencement 22$^{nd}$ September)

…

**Reporting / Certification**

The Executive Officer will issue Certificates of Attendance and Achievement. Where a TCE short course can be identified, this will also be issued. The Certificate of Achievement will include a course descriptor and results where appropriate.

### b.    Behaviour Management Protocols
**Real Learning Real Futures Program 2003**

1.  All schools operate according to the Behaviour Management Guidelines.

2.  Students will engage with the Behaviour Management system of the host school, when:

    •   a behaviour issue is of a level that can be managed within the classroom

    •   a behaviour issue is of a level that can be managed by referral to senior staff within the host school

3.  Students will be returned to their originating school when:

    •   behaviour is more serious and cannot be managed by referral to senior staff

    •   the session being attended is of a long duration and its success would be compromised by maintaining the students' attendance.

4.  In order to return a student to the originating school, the host school will:

    •   Telephone the originating school.  The student will then enter the Behaviour Management process at their originating school.

    •   Place the student on the RLRF Project Bus and return them immediately to the originating school.  This option will be used where:

        –   bus travel has been required to transport the students to the project venues.

        –   the usage of the bus will not jeopardise the timeframes or supervision requirements of the projects.

        –   duty of care provisions allow for the student to travel on the bus with the driver as supervisor.

        –   Where II. and III. occur someone from the home school will be required to travel to the project site to collect the student.

    •   Inform the project co-ordinator of the incident.

    •   If the above means of transport are not available or appropriate, support may be sought from Derwent Support Service to assist in the transport of a student.

5.  If a student has to be returned to their originating school, they are automatically withdrawn from the RLRF project option.

6.  If a student requires withdrawal to relocation or time out within the host school, return to the RLRF project option is at the discretion of the host teacher and will be negotiated between the student and teacher concerned.
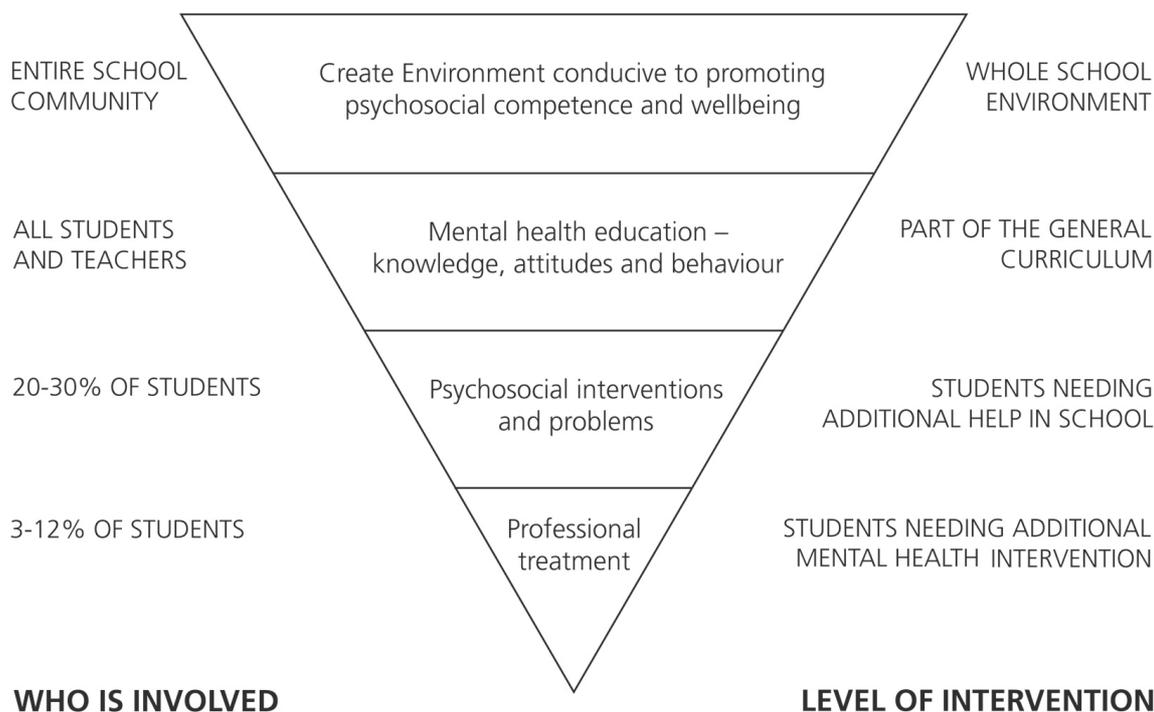
### c. Student Enrolment Protocols
**Real Learning Real Futures Program 2003**

1. Each school will be allocated a percentage of the total student places available for each course, except where otherwise indicated by the management team.

2. Each school will individually allocate these places to students, using the principles underpinning the Real Learning, Real Futures Program:

   - Balance of at-risk and other types of students

   - Work towards retention and participation in future education and training

   - Equity of access

   - Inclusion

   Each school will undertake an 'enrolment process' whereby students apply to participate in the projects of their choice.

3. An enrolment process will be put in place, which will require schools to submit names for project places. Once deadlines have passed vacant positions will be advertised to other schools on a first come, first served basis.

4. The project co-ordinator will maintain a record of placements, disciplinary actions and so on.

5. Participation certificates will be awarded to students who successfully complete the Real Learning Real Futures projects.

6. This process to be reviewed late Term 1.

## Health Intervention Model



| WHO IS INVOLVED | | LEVEL OF INTERVENTION |
|---|---|---|
| ENTIRE SCHOOL COMMUNITY | Create Environment conducive to promoting psychosocial competence and wellbeing | WHOLE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT |
| ALL STUDENTS AND TEACHERS | Mental health education – knowledge, attitudes and behaviour | PART OF THE GENERAL CURRICULUM |
| 20-30% OF STUDENTS | Psychosocial interventions and problems | STUDENTS NEEDING ADDITIONAL HELP IN SCHOOL |
| 3-12% OF STUDENTS | Professional treatment | STUDENTS NEEDING ADDITIONAL MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTION |

### School Environment

The widest part of the triangle represents the emphasis that the whole school approach places on creating an environment that is 'health promoting' for all participants.  This layer involves the entire school community:  the quality of the relationships with parents, students and with community agencies, the school ethos, and the nature of school policies.

This framework encourages all teachers to see themselves as teaching for mental health by fostering a supportive social and learning environment, promoting resilience, self-esteem and social skills, offering a stimulating and challenging curriculum program and fostering close links between the school and families.  School-wide activity to promote mental health may also include activities as varied as community forums, mental health days, multi-cultural events, arts festivals, transition and peer support programs, professional development or a conscious emphasis on maintaining a pro-social environment in every classroom.

### Primary Prevention

The second level of the triangle depicts the provision of curriculum programs designed to promote mental health via the development of communication, help-seeking and problem-solving skills.  This activity can be termed primary prevention as it aims to prevent or reduce the inci-

dence of harmful or unhealthy attitudes or behaviours. It may include a comprehensive health education curriculum and pastoral care program. It will entail all teachers promoting skills of communication and problem-solving and maintaining a sense of purpose and challenge in their ongoing program.

The *MindMatters* curriculum units focusing on enhancing resilience, dealing with bullying, understanding mental illness and dealing with loss and grief model ways to teach for as well as about mental health. Many of the sessions utilise experiential and interactive teaching strategies designed to promote engagement, skills development and a sense of connectedness. These activities can introduce a level of fun and vitality into the classroom and at the same time require students to cooperate and communicate in order to address the challenges inherent in the tasks. Guided discussion is used to assist students to move from an experiential to a reflective mode and to find a language to talk about what it is to be human and to face change and challenge.

**Early Intervention**

All students, including those 'at risk' or encountering specific life challenges, benefit from the provision of curriculum programs and the maintenance of a positive school ethos. The third level of the triangle indicates the need for school-based structures designed to identify and provide additional support for those students dealing with particular social, emotional or mental health problems. This can be termed early recognition and intervention as it involves detecting a mental health problem at an early stage and providing effective support.

*MindMatters* encourages schools to review the way in which they identify, and intervene to refer and support these students. Targeted programs, individual counselling, consultation with parents or referrals to outside agencies may be required to assist students requiring additional support at certain stages of their school life or in response to challenging life situations.

**Assessment and Referral**

The fourth level of the triangle indicates the small percentage of students who require professional assessment or treatment for mental health problems. This level can involve referral and in some instances crisis management. The school can play a critical role in referring students and families dealing with depression, anxiety, isolation, eating disorders, substance use problems, family break-up, or parental mental health problems. Whilst this level of treatment is not usually provided by school personnel, the school will nonetheless play a role in referral and be required to continue to support the student undergoing treatment or to assist with reintegration into school life.

From: MindMatters Consortium (1999) 'MindMatters: A Whole School Approach Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing – Final Report to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care', Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.