

CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES

STAGE ONE

**A DESIGN EVALUATION OF NETSCHOOL: AN ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND A PROGRAM OF BENDIGO SENIOR
SECONDARY COLLEGE**

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1 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This report describes a design evaluation project undertaken with NETschool in 2006. The report outlines the background and objectives of the project, then details findings and makes recommendations for a stage 2 evaluation of project outcomes and professional development strategies for program staff.

NETschool is one of a growing number of alternative educational programs designed to address systematic disadvantage arising from premature disengagement from schooling. Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) established NETschool in 2005 to provide an alternative educational program for students not suited to 'mainstream' secondary schools but who wish to continue with their education. NETschool provides student centred curriculum with intensive support.

The program is financially and administratively part of BSSC yet delivered in an off campus setting. Staffed by teachers drawn both part time from BSSC and employed directly from the community, it employs four teaching staff, one manager and an administrative officer (*totalling 4.1EFT*). NETschool offers twenty home based student positions and thirty centre based student positions.

The funding proposal for NETschool states the program will be evaluated in the first, second and third years to 'evaluate the re-engagement and education strategies used in the project with the aim of determining their effectiveness and making necessary adjustments as the project proceeds' and to 'conduct research into all elements of the model with a view to determine its effectiveness and recommending the degree of transferability to other communities and settings' (BSSC 2004).

During the first year of operations, BSSC approached the School of Social Work and Social Policy, La Trobe University Bendigo to undertake an impact evaluation of the program. Early discussions revealed the organic and fluid nature of the program's development. Drawing from Owen and Rogers (1999) it was agreed that the first step in

evaluation would be to explore and articulate the program logic; from that clarify key processes and goals, then develop success indicators and staff professional development needs. The aim of the project was to;

- develop a clear understanding of the program components, (design logic)
- recommend ways to measure program effectiveness and
- establish processes to develop best practice.

1.1 PROJECT OBJECTIVES;

- Understand the students and staff perceptions of the program,
- Map the learning and teaching model used in the program,
- Identify evaluation tools congruent with the program and consistent with stakeholder expectations
- Identify the professional development needs of teachers involved in the program.

2 METHOD

The study was based on approaches to research which are inductive, that is, developing theory as it is practiced in the field. It is popular in social programs like NETschool because they are often developed in action.

Owen and Rogers (1999) usefully describe various evaluation forms for different project types, stages of project development and project aims. They suggest that before impact evaluation can be satisfactorily achieved, a clear program design needs to be available. Design or ‘clarificative evaluation’ intends to make design clear and uncover some of the implicit social theory on which it is based. The result is a program logic which “discovers and formalises the program’s theory of action” (Patton, 1977 in Owen and Rogers 1999: 195). It provides an understanding of the key components of the program, and the cause-effect relationship between them. It details values and assumptions, theoretical underpinnings, and provides direction to methodology and tools for program

evaluation (Owen and Rogers 1999). Design logic is documented and then indicators of success defined. Stakeholders are taken through a series of meetings where they clarify and define the program, its key components and its underlying theory.

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University, and the Department of Education ethics committees to undertake a study involving group interviews with teachers and individual interviews with students. Four group meetings were held with teachers to distil the logic of the program; its aims, components, processes, values and underlying theory and literature base. Students were invited to participate via a flyer that was distributed throughout the school. Information forms were also sent to all students via the school administration. Written consent to be involved in interviews was obtained from parents for dependent students or in the case of independent students; consent was obtained from the student themselves. Nine student interviews were undertaken, audio taped and thematically analysed to determine student perceptions of the program logic, and their reasons for attending NETschool. All but one student was currently active with NETschool. All students interviewed were involved in the intensive support program.

3 PROGRAM LOGIC

3.1 ONGOING EVOLUTION OF PROGRAM IDEAS.

NETschool has been an organic program that has evolved over two or more years through;

- ideas senior staff have brought with them about the nature of school disengagement and how it can be responded to through alternative educational formats,
- day to day experience with students as the program was implemented,
- observation of internationally recognised programs,
- alternative educational literature.

Initially, the formative idea behind the program was that there could be innovative technologically based solutions to student disengagement. One underlying program assumption was that curriculum could be delivered to students in online formats and, with additional support, these students could achieve a range of educational goals (BSSC, 2004)

Program success was described as ‘completion of certified programs or ... re-integration into traditional school or education settings, successful pathways to work or further training.’ (BSSC 2004) In addition there was a strong early view that this program could be a source of learning for BSSC about student disengagement more broadly and ways to reduce it. i.e ‘upstream’ the knowledge learnt in this program to reduce ‘the downstream flow’ (Düsseldorf Skills Forum, 2004).

There was considerable on the ground development of the program during the first year, emerging from lessons learnt and from sponsored overseas observations of alternative educational programs. Teachers were particularly influenced by Dennis Littkey’s (2004) approach to education summarised as; small school environments, intensive family and community involvement in educational development, authentic projects in real world settings and a ‘one child at a time’ philosophy. This could be described as a strengths based approach to education, where individual student deficits are not focused on and programs are informed by the socio-cultural and institutional contexts of educational opportunities. Littkey argues very strongly that schools need to be very different in their approach if they want to engage young people in life long learning, particularly students from excluded or disadvantaged socio cultural groups. (Littkey, 2004)

3.2 CURRENT PROGRAM LOGIC

The current program logic is diagrammatically represented in Appendix 1. This logic represents current staff perceptions of the program assumptions, processes, key relationships, and preferred outcomes. If the components are delivered in the best possible way and they occur in this particular order, then specified outcomes are assumed to occur.

The components have been identified as

- How the problem of school disengagement is understood
- Establishing eligibility/Entering the program
- Program resources; adequate funding and operating space, staff skills in developing relationships with young people, staff skills and attributes in case management, staff professional development opportunities, internal support and supervision, connections to other program resources, connections to similar educational programs locally, state-wide and internationally.
- Establishment of mentor–learner relationship/ case management: empowerment based action learning cycle
- Mentor /learner reflection and documentation processes
- Outcomes for learner stronger sense of self, increased self efficacy, broader social connectedness, entry to further ed or workforce,

A detailed description of these components now follows.

3.3 HOW STAFF UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM OF SCHOOL DISENGAGEMENT.

Staff view students through a combination problem centred “at risk” psychosocial framework, and an institutional failure framework. The psycho social framework logic is; students have complex lives: low socio-economic status and attending issues, sad and painful family stories, behavioural issues, drug use issues, teen pregnancy and or young babies. The institutional failure framework has the following logic; mainstream schools don’t work for young people who have complex social and emotional needs. The way they are structured makes it very difficult for teachers to develop the kind of relationships these students need in order to feel a sense of belonging at school. These learners are at risk of continued social exclusion through educational disengagement. Together these understandings can be summarised as follows:

The mainstream education system has failed these high need learners; they have disengaged with mainstream educational institutions and require education in an alternative relationship rich environment.

3.4 ELIGIBILITY FOR NETSCHOOL

NETschool has a selection process that is based on two criteria;

1) motivation

2) attachment to a significant other.

Staff assess motivation or goal directedness of students through an initial interview. A staff member assesses the extent to which a student has a sense of their future, and the possibility of achieving it (self efficacy). It is argued that this is the basis of selection because the program is attempting to help student identify and take charge of their future and develop and achieve their own goals. If students come without a trace of motivation (staff argue only a tiny amount is needed to start with; a ‘twinkle in the eye’) then other more welfare oriented programs may be more beneficial in the first instance.

The second criterion is attachment to a significant other. NETschool staff view the whole family as the client, and try to engage the parents or carers in the educational process

These two eligibility criteria differentiate NETschool from other similar programs in Bendigo. Another point of difference might be the length of time the student has been disengaged. All of the students I interviewed had come directly from school to NETschool with a minimum delay. Other programs may be involved with students who have been out of school for some time. This idea needs further exploration.

3.5 PROGRAM AND STAFF RESOURCES

The program at NETschool is delivered individually to each student within a Mentor-Learner relationship, through group programs developed to enhance social and interpersonal skills, and through day to day interaction with duty staff. Students are referred to school support services and to outside agencies for additional psycho social support on a case by case basis. Some students are involved in community based mental health services and family support services. The quality of staff-student relationships is central to the success of the programs, and is dependent on the resources staff bring to those relationships. Desired staff skills include:

- an ability to develop a relationship with young people, particularly those with high needs/limited trust
- an understanding of case management techniques,

- an understanding and ability to work across the social welfare sector,
- a willingness to explore new approaches to learning and teaching at a secondary level.
- a capacity for learning through self reflection

Other program resources include;

- Funding (the adequacy and stability of this in this has not been a focus of this study)
- Space: the nature of the space is a key aspect of quality learning and nature of the space at NETschool needs further evaluation
- Links with other similar providers, networking learning from other programs, links to national alternative learning networks
- Links with BSSC student welfare resources

The Mentor/learner relationship is a key component of the program and is in early stages of articulation. It needs deeper exploration to ascertain its nature, and the qualities and approaches that work for students and teachers.

3.6 ACTION REFLECTION CYCLE

The action reflection cycle (Kolb 1984), whilst needing further articulation and development, represents the method used to progress the student-mentor relationship, solve emerging problems, draw on group and outside resources and assist the learner to reflect on their own personal and educational development. The cycle commences with initial assessment of the student for entry and initial goals are established, the next phase is development of a learning plan, owned by the student, the reflection opportunities are currently verbal in the weekly staff meetings were mentors gain resources, ideas and support on how to progress their student. Reflection also occurs with the student in regular planned and ad hoc discussions. There is a six month review phase where the student and mentor reflect on progress and new plans may be developed.

This cycle is in very early stages of development and would benefit from significant and regular documentation of reflections by each mentor and learner. Another aspect of reflection that could be built in is a reflection on the literature and theoretical frameworks and values brought to bear in each interaction. This would help advance the programs capacity to articulate what it does and how it does it.

3.7 DOCUMENTATION THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAM

This aspect of the program was not fully explored by the researcher and needs further exploration.

3.8 EXITING THE PROGRAM

Discussions with staff suggest that most learners leave the program at the conclusion of the school year. Some learners exit the program throughout the year as they achieve personal goals, if they choose other educational options if the program doesn't suit them, or their personal issues dominate their lives to the exclusion of education. In 2006

- There were 62 enrolments
- 53 numbers of students remained engaged with education, full-time work or training after 12 months.
- 9 students left without achieving their own goals

The researcher did not ask students about exiting, nor did she examine program documents. This is an area for further exploration.

3.9 PREFERRED LEARNER OUTCOMES

Staff identified a range of preferred outcomes for learners ranging from positive 'destinations':

- qualifications of VCE and VCAL
- enrolment to a further education institution such as TAFE
- a traineeship.
- Decision to enter the workforce

To a range of changes in the learner's skills, abilities, self efficacy

- Enhanced identity awareness: enhanced self perception enhanced self reflectivity, enhanced self efficacy

- Enhanced skills and abilities; increased learner capacity for problem solving,
- Enhanced number and quality of learner social relationships.

And

- Achievement of learners own incremental goals,

4 WHAT CURRENT STUDENTS THINK ABOUT NETSCHOOL

4.1 STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR REASONS FOR ATTENDING NETSCHOOL

On the whole, students reported that they attend NETschool because they have had difficulty attending another secondary school, either in junior secondary , yrs 7,8,9, 10 or senior secondary, years 11, or 12yrs. Difficulties were reported as combinations of;

- serious ill health, (physical, mental and emotional) which has made attending school difficult,
- related social problems, unresolved bullying, feelings of isolation, loneliness or fear,
- behavioural problems; acknowledged by students that they were often 'in trouble' and had unsuccessful relationships with teachers in authority,
- difficulty performing academically.

Generally, there was a strong sense of not coping with a big, complex school environment. Students' negative school experiences were experienced over some period of time and other attempts to resolve them had not succeeded. Some students were expelled from previous schools for behavioural issues; some students reported schools recommended they leave, some left on their own accord. All of the students had been recommended NETschool either by a 'welfare worker', or they had a parent (usually a mother) who found out about this option through her social /community networks.

4.2 STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF NETSCHOOL

The overwhelming majority of students interviewed were very positive about their NETschool experience. This is not surprising as student attendance is voluntary and dissatisfied students or those whose needs are not met are likely to withdraw. Students identified the following as characteristics of the NETschool approach:

- **Small is good:** Students noted this aspect of NETschool and preferred this smaller learning environment over the larger secondary school setting
- **Student centred learning:** Students appreciated that they determined the focus of their learning. Some students had chosen to pursue VCE; others had chosen to do personal projects of relevance to them.
- **Respect:** A clear difference between mainstream and NETschool according to students was the relationship between the students (Learners) and Teachers (Mentors). Students reported they felt a greater sense of respect from Mentors at NETschool than in other educational settings.
- **Flexibility is valued:** The ability to go to classes, or stay on the NETschool Campus and get material about classes, and to build up the confidence to go to classes.
- **Voluntary:** It was important to them that they were choosing to be at NETschool.
- **Motivation:** Students were clear that motivation was important and their responsibility.
- **Privilege:** There was a sense that this was a second chance and a privilege not to be wasted.

4.2.1 Mentor Role

Students understood the Mentor was to keep them focused on their goals, listen to them and keep them on track. Students understood the Mentor as practical aid to getting things done; school work, ideas, finding out where to go. It was clear they could talk to a Mentor about a broader range of issues than they could with a teacher. Some had counsellors as well and were able to articulate a difference between the roles.

4.2.2 Group dynamics

Students reported that occasionally students' antisocial behaviour needed to be addressed but that generally the atmosphere at NETschool was positive. There was a sense of knowing everybody had issues to deal with, and they were all in the same boat. Group

work was largely invisible; students view of the purpose was to have fun not to work on group process.

5 HOW DOES THIS PROGRAM FIT INTO THE CONTEXT OF OTHER ALTERNATIVE SECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS?

There is an emergent literature in Australia, the USA and the UK into which this program logic fits. The Dusseldorf Skills Forum Learning Choices Expo Communiqué (2004) celebrated a shared view of alternative education as ‘...learning for life...let me be me and ...relationships matter’.

They argued,

Underpinning successful ‘alternative education’ are three critical elements: equipping young people to exercise control over their lives; ensuring that it is meaningful and important to the young people themselves; and enabling them to develop stronger bonds with those around them. Taken together these three elements provide the necessary conditions for learning.(DSF 2004)

A brief survey of the ‘alternative education literature demonstrates that NETschool logic is heading in a similar direction to other programs in Victoria and Australia delivered from schools, TAFEs, and community based labour market training providers. The way the ‘problem’ is understood, the principals of the program and the outcomes they are working to achieve are common to a range of alternative formats. However none are identical as they are all organic and operated as small scale enterprises to meet local issues and the needs of young people.

The way participants in this program, (both teachers and students) understand the social and individual problems NETschool is attempting to address is familiar in the case studies and reports about ‘at risk youth’, or ‘disengaged youth’ or ‘early school leavers’. Cole (2004) argues that at risk youth participating in alternative settings are a diverse group with a range of needs, never the less he categorizes them into three groups not dissimilar to the profile at NETschool

- those who will not or do not attend school - their parents might have let them drop out or they experienced failure or were bullied, but they are basically 'normal' kids with a dislike for or an apathy/antipathy towards schooling;
- those who have low self esteem mostly due to literacy and numeracy problems, but who also might have problems at home or experience mild intellectual disability which may be contributing to their difficulty with formal school learning;
- those who are significantly 'damaged' or disadvantaged – they are likely to be in care, to have some experience of the juvenile justice system, to have psychological problems and to have a drug, alcohol or other substance abuse problem.

Dwyer et al (1998 in Zyngier, D. Gale, T. 2003) has a more straightforward framework based on the process of leaving school. He suggests that there are 3 sorts of early school leavers:

- (i) those that elect out,
- (ii) those that drift out and
- (iii) those who are driven out.

Students have similar pathways to NETschool.

Based on an extensive review of the literature around at risk discourse in Australia and overseas, Zyngier and Gale (2003) argue that there are two clear perspectives on understanding at risk young people which underpin alternative educational programs; a deficit perspective and a socio-cultural perspective. The deficit perspective:

locates the problem with the student and focuses on what students do not have as a result of problematic personal, home or community circumstances... responding programs try to remedy or 'give' students those attributes they are lacking ... (Zyngier, and Gale 2003:32)

A socio-cultural view understands risk

as a social construction manufactured through the systems and processes of institutions such as schooling. It seeks to identify contextual influences within

schools and communities that impact positively or negatively on student outcomes. (Zyngier, and Gale 2003:32)

NETschool perspective combines a deficit view with a socio-cultural view. Littkey, (2004) (from which NETschool draws its vision) exemplifies the socio-cultural framework, whilst staff understanding, perhaps drawn from teacher training, leans towards deficit/behaviorist approaches.

The direction NETschool is taking fits with best practice principles emerging across Australia. In a Victorian study for DEET, James Ledger and Ward (2001) suggest that the key determinants of increased retention of educationally disengaged youth are:

- improved connectedness between teachers and students (friendliness, improving trust, mutual concern and respect) and between students and their peers
- improved curriculum (greater breadth, more vocational and practical studies, personal development and life skills)
- improved school climate (caring, supportive environment, relaxed and informal).(in Cole 2004 p 5,6)

Zyngier, D. Gale, T. (2003) suggest that there is some agreement within the research on the following principals for best practice in alternative formats for increased student engagement:

- Successful programs are both mainstream and relevant, reflecting real world problems. They do not focus on remediation or basic skills, nor are they based on withdrawal or separate programs for the few chosen to participate.
- Successful programs are socially supportive, intellectually challenging and respond to student needs both current and in the long term.
- The selection and training of the participating teachers is crucial, supported by a leadership environment that promotes a professional learning community within the workplace
- Successful programs actively involve and connect to the students' world and the community.

Victorian Research into indicators of student well being (Fraillon 2005) argues that wellbeing can be categorized into intra personal and interpersonal categories. In particular they define five areas of relevance to NETschool goals:

Self-efficacy refers to the degree to which a person believes themselves able to organise, execute and adapt strategies to meet desired outcomes. Self-efficacy beliefs are positively associated with school performance and this has been explained both in terms of the accuracy of students' judgements about their own capacities and the positive association between high levels of self-efficacy and persistence and perseverance.

Self-esteem describes the affective component of self concept; it refers to the way people feel about themselves that are explicitly age and context appropriate.

Curiosity is the intrinsic desire to learn more. In students it is a motivational force that is manifested by its capacity to energise and control the direction of learning behaviors such as information seeking and problem solving. In the school context, curiosity will be manifested by students' capacity to engage with school based tasks independent of perceptions of external reward, and to devise and focus on strategies to explore learning. Evidence of curiosity in a school context would come from the processes rather than the outcomes of student task completion.

Connectedness is the 'subjective awareness of being in close relationship with the social world' It represents a meaningful linkage with a 'wide range of people and a diversity of peers' In the school community, connectedness will be represented by the number, range, quality and appropriateness of social relationships students develop. Evidence of high levels of connectedness will come from student demonstrations of successful, purposeful relations with a range of their peers, teachers and other members of the school community across a range of contexts.

Engagement includes both engagement with the learning process and engagement with the school community. Learning engagement includes the 'attention, interest, investment and effort students expend in the work of learning' (H. Marks, 2000). School community engagement includes students' feelings about, responses to interactions with and participation in the culture and traditions of the school as well as in school community activities and events such as sporting teams, clubs and student representation (Finn, 1993). Student engagement is highly valued by educational administrators and is regarded as a fundamental measure of school and student well-being. Student engagement is a manifestation of effective function through the quality and range of student participation in learning and school community life. (Fraillon 2004:34)

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This brief piece of research has developed a beginning program logic that needs considerable fleshing out so that all aspects of the program from meeting target population, through to student exit and all the process in between are documented in terms of goals, policies, procedures and processes. In particular the mentor learner relationship as the centre piece of the program needs to be clearly articulated as does the program relationship with the family or significant other.

It is not until there are consistent and transparent processes that there can be any management or control over program outcomes or success. In addition, once key program components are more consistently delivered, a more experimental research project could be undertaken. For example some factors could be isolated, for example; mentor style and learner characteristics and a hypothesis could be developed and tested to determine what kind of intervention works best for what kind of presentation. This evidence based approach would be very useful in some stake holder conversations. Goal achievement can still be measured more broadly but specific contributing factors cannot be isolated without detailed further work.

This study proposes ongoing work in three areas: those relating to

- component details and documentation
- empirical work to measure learners goal achievement
- staff professional development

6.1 COMPONENT DETAILS AND DOCUMENTATION

Littky (2004) articulates an alternative set of institutional arrangements that he proposes will lead to better educational outcomes for learners. For Littky, processes of education need to be restructured. If the processes change, the experiences will change, and the outcomes will change. Littky argues that experiential based community linked learning, in small groups rather than a “one size fits all” national or state level curriculum is likely to lead to better learning outcomes. Following Littkey, **process is all**. In this way NETschool needs to focus on its processes, articulate them, monitor them and develop

them further so it can reflect on its own improvements and contribute to discussion on best practice in this emerging field.

Each of the components of this program need detailed articulation, documentation, goal setting, establishment of performance indicators, reporting against performance indicators and regular performance review. For example:

Does the program reach the target population?

- Define the target population, how is this programs target population different that the target population of similar programs in Bendigo?
- How is the program marketed?
- Who attends the program? Numbers and types (requires categorisation)
- How do students find out about the program?(requires data collection on referral sources)
- Document the assessment process (requires proforma assessment procedures and documents)
- Is the initial assessment process resulting in the target population entering the program? (interpretation of data)

What are the key characteristics of a successful mentor-learner relationship?

- Define and document the mentor role (literature search and staff self reflection)
- Reflect on and document available mentor styles(staff self reflection and observation of each other)
- Articulate a service statement on mentor style and preferred skills and abilities of staff members and ways to identify those abilities
- Utilise knowledge to select staff
- Develop indicators of success for mentor/ learner relationship

Articulate and Document the relationship between the program and significant others/families of learners.

- What is the program trying to achieve here
- What processes need to be in place to achieve it

- What might work to overcome cultural barriers(literature review)
- What indicators need to be developed to measure goal achievement (attendance at recognition nights , interviews, session where families are involved

Articulation and documentation of the relationship with other similar programs in the sector, St Lukes, Goldfield Learning Network

- Clear delineation of program differences and similarities targets and goals and approaches
- Developing network to exchange resources skills etc

Recommendation 1: That NETschool allocate resources to document its policies and procedures for all aspects of its programs including program entry, and the nature of stakeholder relationships.

6.2 EMPIRICAL WORK TO MEASURE GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

The program logic details preferred outcomes for learners. These are summarised as enhanced internalised sense of self, increased value on life long learning, enhanced social relationships, congruent destinations with life stage ie further education or workforce participation. There are a number of pathways to achieve measures of goal achievement.

1 Learner defined goals, written and verbal narrative reflections on goal achievement. Following the student centred learning approach it would be methodologically congruent to deal with this subjectively through narrative form. This means that goal achievement could be defined by learners and goal attainment could be understood qualitatively through learners narrative journals. Learners would be assisted in this process to define their goals, reflect on the extent of their achievements as well as the processes they went through to achieve them, thus assisting in development their reflective capacity. Learners would be assisted to write reflective journal entries each week. Data here would be stories told, stories written, stories heard. Permission would need to be gained from students to use their stories in program reporting forums. This way achievement is reported from students' perspectives. Whilst literacy or limited

literacy is an issue here, these narrative forms could be used as a literacy development tools as well as personal development tools.

If narrative is a preferred therapeutic tool and not data for research as such, then learners achievement of personal goals can be collected through a one off interview with researchers as each student exits the program.

2. Teacher defined and measured goals.

This more traditional way requires identifying goals and developing indicators to measure their achievement. This study and supportive literature suggests that

- enhanced self efficacy
- enhanced self esteem
- enhanced curiosity
- enhanced connectedness
- enhanced engagement see (Fallion 2005).

are four indicators which may mean the learner is able to operate in a more goal directed way in the broader community and may have developed values of life long learning.

Recommendation 2: that a study be commenced to measure enhancements in students self perceptions resulting from this program and to interview students to understand the extent to which learners have achieved their own learning goals through the program.

3. Attendance, Retention and Destination Data,

The program should maintain data on attendance and retention as proxy indicators of student satisfaction, as well as destinations data as a crude proxy for success. Some programs do a 3\6 month follow up to get a ‘longer term’ view of participant destinations.

Recommendation 3. Attendance, retention and destination data is systematically gathered from all students who enrol at NETschool no matter their length of stay.

6.3 THE NEED TO DEVELOP A REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

There is a wealth of learning theory which can be drawn on to improve the NETschool program. Understanding teachers as learners who in this case are learning through experience can lead to the development of very sound professional practice. Kolb (1984) provides a very useful model which can be used as the basis for this type of reflective professional practice.

Already the NETschool team operate in part in this manner. What is needed is some guidance in reflective practice, the development of journaling tools, and a willingness to discuss challenges and reflections with the team. It is worth considering Dennis Littky approach to weekly reflection.

In more than 30 years I haven't missed writing a single TGIF. Each Thursday night I sit down look back at my week react, analyse, reflect, and plan. It's been my way to take count of where I am and let my staff know where I will be...
(Littkey 2004: xv)

Recommendation 4: That NETschool staff undertake training in reflective practice, to develop better articulation of their practice model and to build an evidence base for their preferred best practice models.

6.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

This program crosses the boundaries between education and social welfare. As such the staff need to have skills as holistic educators, to work at a number of levels with the 'whole' young person; the emotional, the social, the personal as well as the cognitive. The team need to regularly identify areas for professional development Program budgets need to allocate funds for professional development for each staff member and participation should become part of each staff members annual performance plan. All staff should have competence in ;

- Risk assessment training (to consider actions needed if/when young people self harm or threaten to harm others)
- Case management training ; there is a wealth of training available to the many human services professional who provide case management as their central task
- Advanced reflective listening skills

Depending on the background of staff, some may find it helpful to undertake

- Motivational counselling training (useful for adult approaches to behaviour change issues)
- Human Service Sector Awareness training (who does what ...staff meetings guest speakers)
- Interdisciplinary awareness training (perspectives and discourses of social work, psychology, youth work....

Recommendation 5: That resources are allocated to a systematic professional training program based on individual staff and program need.

6.5 A SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAGE 2

This project has gathered information from staff students and relevant literature to complete a design evaluation of NETschool. The study has found that NETschool is an organic program, operated by staff with clear commitment towards the wellbeing of students, and has a logic consistent with an emerging educational approach to re engage students who are disadvantaged in the current educational institutions. The NETschool Program design has been made explicit and detailed through a number of clear stages. (See appendix 1) Indicators of success have been identified as have professional development needs.

More needs to be done. It is recommended that a funded stage two project be developed with the following aims:

- To develop a learners outcomes study, based on before and after test of learners' self esteem , self efficacy and connectedness, one off interviews of students on exiting the program, and collection of destinations and retention data.
- To develop a deeper articulation and documentation of each component especially the Mentor-Learner relationship, the NETschool-family relationship, protocols with other agencies, entry and exit processes.

- To develop clear program documentation for reporting and accountability purposes
- To implement a professional development strategy based reflective practice.

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**Appendix 1 Program logic for NETSCHOOL
November 2006**

