

# Edmund Rice Education Flexible Learning Centres

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occasional paper series



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**Flexible Learning Centres**

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## FOREWORD

The ministry of Jesus is profound in intention and action. It is a ministry centred on responding to human need; one that recognises that all humanity is reflective of the Divine and is challenged towards fullness of life. The vision of Blessed Edmund Rice, the Christian Brothers and all who operate in communion and service of the Christian vision are a manifestation of Christ's outreach in contemporary culture.

The Trustees of the Christian Brothers within Queensland and Northern Territory are appreciative and encouraging of educational initiatives that extend services to those who are disengaged. Through programmes provided at the Centre Education Programme, and with the excellence and commitment of professional staff across varied ministries, Christ's vision and the mission of Edmund is being advanced to some of the most educationally needy groups of people within our community.

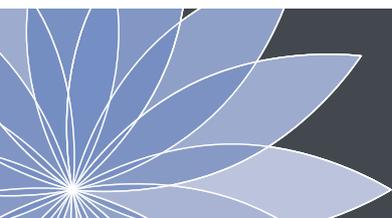
Flexible Learning Centres are a visionary and creative means for mission at a time when education for liberation is so important. The needs of young people demand from us all a response which is centred in service and partnership, one based on the new evangelization which seeks to understand and be responsive to the needs of the times. Yet, while we endeavour to be responsive to the needs of others, we are at the same time drawn into areas of growth for ourselves. The ministry with others is therefore both giving and receiving, one of mutually growing as we all journey in life and in education.

My congratulations and appreciation to those who have contributed to this document. The material is indicative of considerable reflection. It captures not only our current approach to those most disengaged from education, but in doing so gives recognition to the legacy of contribution of so many.

In Jesus and Blessed Edmund



Br Luke Quinn  
**Provincial - St Francis Xavier Province**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper arises from a summation of experience, commitment and wisdom from a wide cross-section of people involved with the mission of the Christian Brothers.

Appreciation is registered for the initial vision and outreach of Brother T. A. Kingston cfc and to subsequent Principals and staff of the Centre Education Programme, Kingston. The support of readers and members of the Strategic Advisory Team for Mission Outreach (Special Projects) is also acknowledged.

I would like to express thanks to Mr Dale Murray and Mrs Ann Isaac in supporting me in the development of this manuscript. Appreciation is also expressed to Mrs Sue Kavanagh for manuscript production.



Bill Sultmann  
**Executive Director**  
**Edmund Rice Education**

## CHAPTER 1 – RATIONALE FOR PARTNERSHIP

The development of Flexible Learning Centres arises from a number of inter-related influences, all of which contribute to a unique and significant educational culture for service to disengaged young people.

### 1.1 Mission

Edmund Rice, the founder of the Christian Brothers, established an education system that was relationship based, outreaching, inclusive, just, and relevant to its time. Centred in the Christian tradition, it gave priority to the uniqueness and dignity of each person. The educational insight of Edmund was that personal and community liberation could be achieved through educational experiences that enable transformation.

The contemporary vision of the Christian Brothers is formed and reformed in response to 'the needs of the day'. Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice tradition, together with other educational and community services centred in the same philosophy, provide wholistic education that attends to the individual needs of students within a dynamic learning community.

### 1.2 Government Policy

Education policy at a national level is influenced by social, economic, cultural and technological changes. In particular, recent policies have focused on the growth of vocational skills, student retention, values education, literacy and numeracy, learning for the workplace and teaching quality. Moreover, Australian Government programmes have been driven by data from national benchmark testing, and the desire for inclusion, particularly of Indigenous students.

Education policies of the Queensland Government reflect and extend national policy and trends. This is expressed in the State Government's *Education and Training Reforms for the Future: A White Paper*, which introduces flexible resourcing and learning options for at risk and disengaged young people aged 15-17 years. Key aspects of the White Paper are its support of partnerships among school, home, community and the identification of students who are required to be meaningfully engaged with either "learning or earning". In supporting greater flexibility of educational programmes the White Paper states,

*We will enhance learning options that provide greater flexibility to meet the needs of even more 15 –17 year olds.*

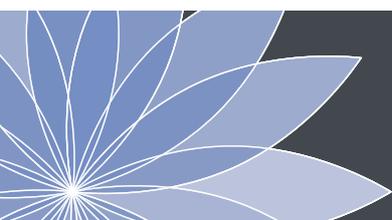
*Any new alternative programmes will be aligned with the ongoing reform of schooling. They will be based on the best available evidence and will use local networks and community partnerships to support young people.*

*To provide more flexible options, we will: continue to support schools that offer education programmes that will re-engage young people who are at risk of disengaging from learning.*

### 1.3 Established Experience

The Christian Brothers have a history of moving to the margins and working with young people who are, for a variety of reasons, disengaged from schooling and significantly alienated from society. Flexible Learning Services were established in Eagleby, Deception Bay, Wadeye, Murgon and Kingston. Knowledge and expertise drawn from these sites now inform practice in current services and planning for new ones. One Flexible Learning Centre that has undergone significant development is the Centre Education Programme (CEP) at Kingston.

The Strategic Plan of the Christian Brothers allows for the exploration of Flexible Learning Centres and related educational, cultural, spiritual and social experiences, particularly for marginalised young people. Using the model of the CEP, appropriate expertise and experience can be offered to new and emerging programmes.



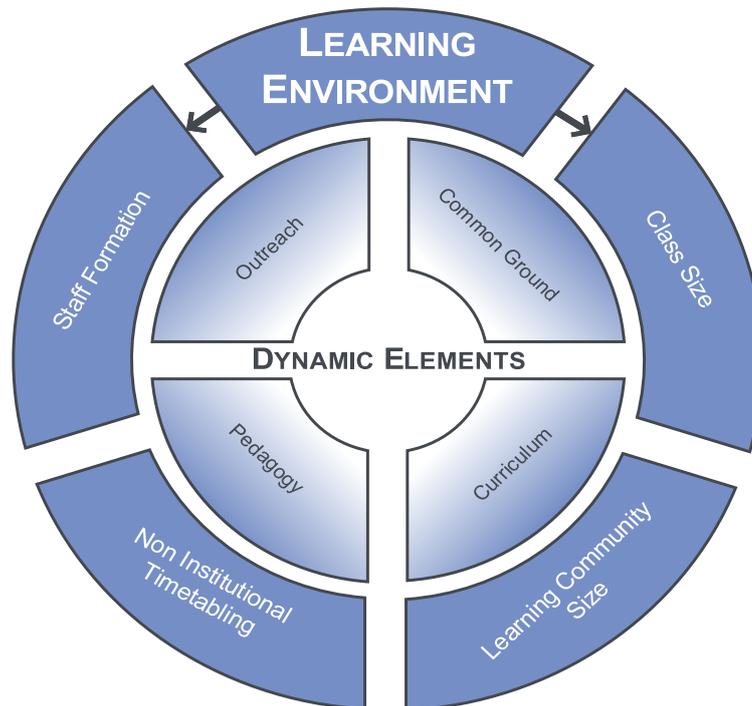
## CHAPTER 2 – THE CENTRE EDUCATION PROGRAMME MODEL

### 2.1 History and Distinctive Qualities

For approximately twenty years, the CEP has provided young people with a place to educationally re-engage through a wholistic learning experience. For those students who attend, it is a significant connection with community and often is the only, and for many the 'last place' for meaningful participation in learning.

The distinctiveness of the CEP is found in four interrelated and dynamic elements: common ground for relationships, student outreach, flexible pedagogy and a relevant curriculum. While these elements of the CEP are not unique to educational provision, they are implemented in a context of staff formation, flexible timetabling, smaller class size and an overall learning community of less than 100 young people.

#### Distinctive Qualities of CEP



### 2.2 Common Ground

The concept of "common ground" applies to all who choose to participate in the programme. Adults and young people alike commit to participate in a learning environment that is democratic, relational and operates through key principles.

Relationships within the programme are based on a respect for personal dignity and recognition of difference. An emphasis is placed on the peaceful resolution of conflict and spirituality is recognised as a universal human experience. Within this understanding of spirituality is the belief that all individuals are unique and gifted.

### **2.2.1 Philosophy**

At one extreme of group management there is a method that is rule governed. This style of management necessitates multiple approaches and contingencies to cover every potential problem situation. At the other extreme of group management is the proposition that there should be no boundaries for group functioning. Neither of these approaches is ideal, as neither promotes social democracy, nor does each meet the unique and unpredictable demands typically experienced within groups. A third alternative, which entails an approach whereby principles are agreed upon (established common ground) and used as a basis for respectful social engagement is therefore recommended.

### **2.2.2 Principles**

The CEP has adopted the common ground principles of RESPECT, SAFE and LEGAL, PARTICIPATION (have a go) and HONESTY (fair dinkum) to guide group relationships. These principles represent broad directions for group practice and establish a common ethical framework which promotes appropriate learning and personal relationships.

The consequences of operating within a common ground set of principles is that all group participants, whether they be staff or students, are accountable for their behaviour. Within this framework emphasis is placed on providing opportunities for the articulation of issues and their resolution. Considerable time, sensitivity and skill are often required to allow for briefing, challenge and registration of on-going expectations.

### **2.2.3 Processes**

Resolution of conflict, negotiation about learning, recognition of rights and responsibilities and acceptance of consequences are modelled and explored both within the group and individually. The process skills necessary to engage in these behaviours are:

- active listening (demonstrating you have heard another);
- open questioning (inviting people to speak - to tell their story);
- problem solving and decision making (being strategic and conclusive);
- negotiation (identifying and agreeing on goals and consequences).

All who attend the CEP are invited and challenged to invest time and trust in the process, and to develop the skills that will ensure they can successfully manage family, school, work and social relationships. Each time all group members enter into this process, skills are further developed and learning is reinforced.

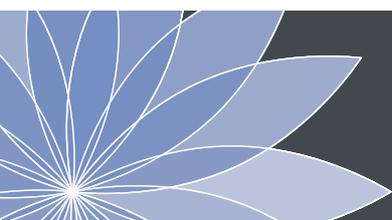
## **2.3 Student Outreach**

The CEP provides an educational outreach to a wide cross section of Indigenous and non-Indigenous male and female students from 13 to 19 years of age. For the most part, students have experienced one or more significant educational, social, psychological, health, legal or familial situations which are debilitating and demand unique responses. Such interventions are commonly educational, but typically also involve legal, medical and welfare personnel and systems.

## **2.4 Flexible Pedagogy**

The CEP offers a flexible pedagogy, characterised by a focus on:

- individual student needs;
- an emphasis on developing a learning community;
- a style of learning that is critically reflective;
- the promotion of a culture of success.



These goals, in combination, represent a relational transaction wherein young people and adults enter into a dialogue that promotes relationship and focuses on the development of rational, emotional and spiritual intelligence.

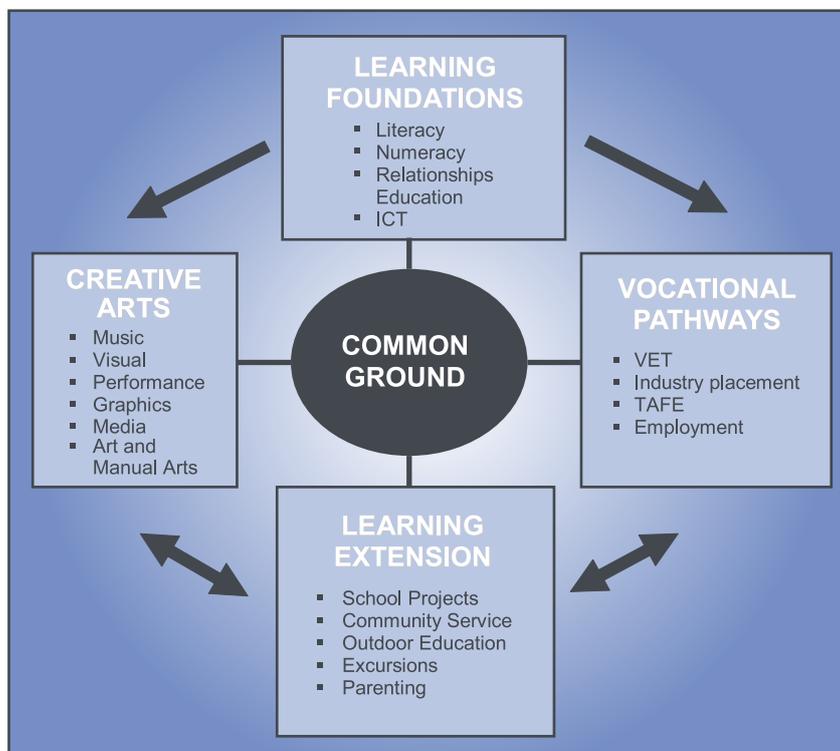
Fundamental to a flexible pedagogy is an emphasis on relationship development. Daily gatherings of staff and students involve reflection on the agreed common ground principles of operation. This process has been the forum where information has been passed on, issues have been raised and (in some cases) resolved, jokes have been told, enrolment rituals played out, birthdays celebrated, deaths mourned and injustices discussed.

Complementing this process is the provision of a formal relationship education programme from which principles and experiences may be drawn by the group. Areas of personal dignity, relationship skills, group dynamics and relationships with creation and the spiritual are seen as valuable and supportive of other learning experiences.

## 2.5 Relevant Curriculum

Curriculum within the CEP is constructed to meet the needs of the individual learner. It begins with an awareness of each learner's circumstances and the creation of a programme that is relevant. It arises from openness, negotiation, and experimentation and is designed to be congruent with sound professional practice and wider community expectations. It typically involves literacy and numeracy, prevocational, vocational and employability skills and a cross section of general learning areas. The Curriculum incorporates an 'outcomes' based approach where content draws from Key Learning Areas and is scaffolded across levels of outcomes. Where curriculum extends into senior schooling domains, areas of assessment and certification follow Statutory Authority guidelines for assessment and reporting.

### Integrated Curriculum Model



## CHAPTER 3 – BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

The CEP has trialled and developed best practice concepts supportive of meaningful learning experiences. While not exhaustive, the following guidelines provide a basis for the establishment of new initiatives.

### 3.1 Clarification of Purpose

Educational experiences within Flexible Learning Centres are designed to support students who are not utilising mainstream schooling opportunities. Their purpose is to foster skills and social development and incorporate curriculum, teaching and learning and general organizational practices that liberate. In this way, Flexible Learning Centres should promote:

#### Curriculum that is:

- pastorally delivered;
- literacy (multi-literacies) and numeracy rich;
- needs based with reference to state and national parameters.

#### Teaching and Learning that is:

- student based;
- customised, negotiated or contract based with agreed outcomes;
- in and beyond the school;
- a mix of learning approaches ;
- whole of life centred.

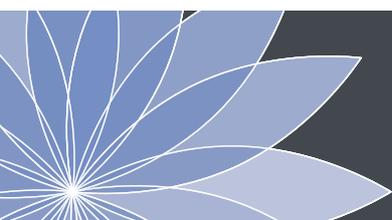
#### Organisational Practices that are:

- attentive to daily attendance of young people;
- inclusive of a range of teachers / para-professional / facilitators and community agencies;
- variable in use of learning sites;
- formally recognised and able to use external accreditation processes.

### 3.2 Professional and Community Support

Flexible Learning Centres are characterised by professionalism and supported by a close relationship with the communities in which they are located. Recognition is given to the related health, welfare, justice and community needs that an individual may possess. With this outreach as a key focus, Flexible Learning Centres should aim to:

- develop strong connections with relevant external organizations and agencies including community services;
- use local agencies, businesses and community services as resources for the programme;
- provide transitions into and out of the programme, to ensure that programme content is clearly connected with developing pathways and opportunities;
- promote community connection to lie at the heart of programme activity so that the community values the programme and the young people;
- build alliances with business and service agencies to enhance learning opportunities;
- provide transition mechanisms and strategies that are planned, managed and achievable while recognising the long-term engagement needs of some students
- connect existing training frameworks and educational processes that frame the learning programmes in terms of key competencies while addressing the specialised needs of students;
- explore mechanisms to be managed between agencies / programmes to enable effective post programme support and monitoring of young people;
- focus on linking student occupational interest with external businesses and activity.



### 3.3 Student Commitment and Affirmation

Students are encouraged to make a commitment to the programme and its principles. Student achievement is valued and celebrated with appropriate recognition. As students are central to the learning community, Flexible Learning Centres should aim to:

- base relationships on the ethos of common ground;
- engender a positive atmosphere with high expectations and standards;
- develop an inclusive, respectful learning culture based upon mutually agreed principles;
- promote active partnership with young people in all aspects of the programme so they are clear about the intentions and the process and suggest ways of achieving them;
- create an atmosphere of inherent support for the students;
- adopt a facilitator approach that is non-didactic – not controlling;
- promote a culture that develops a strong self-concept (e.g. self control, sense of meaning and purpose, responsibility);
- Foster a team approach to learning where staff, students and parents work interdependently.

### 3.4 Family/Carer Involvement

Families are viewed as partners in student educational experiences. While family circumstances may be varied, building positive family and extended relationships is a priority, through such strategies as:

- family days;
- family week (invitation to families/carers to spend time in the FLC over a weekly period);
- cultural days;
- family/carers nights.

### 3.5 Programme Provider Team

Team members use a multi-disciplinary approach to provide health, educational, social and emotional support for students. Teachers and para-professionals develop supportive relationships with their students and liaise closely with associated professionals. In this manner, Flexible Learning Centres should aim to:

- select staff who possess the qualifications, character and experience relevant to the needs of the students;
- select staff who have appropriate welfare or youth work and education qualifications;
- develop and apply risk management skills;
- develop empathic interpersonal skills and attitudes;
- enhance staff capacity to relate effectively with the young people;
- support staff to attend professional development programmes and have access to professional resource support, including regular debriefings and professional supervision;
- provide staff with role statements and contracts that define duties and responsibilities;
- implement individual performance plans that facilitate professional development and a cyclical process of review and renewal;
- provide senior staff with regular professional supervision.

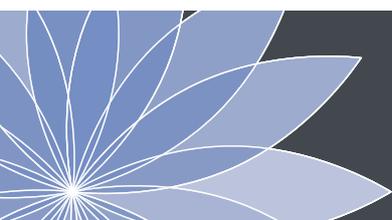
### **3.6 Programme Group**

Group size is a significant factor to successful group instruction. On-task behaviours have been found to be significantly enhanced in instructional groups no greater than ten students and where the overall community of learners does not exceed 100. Learning group size is an important consideration if care is to be offered and monitored, sometimes within challenging behavioural dynamics.

### **3.7 Planning and Administration**

Flexible Learning Centres should involve considerable advocacy, consultation and planning. Central to this is:

- preparation of an annual budget subject to ratification by appropriate structures;
- preparation of a five year projected budget in relation to the Physical resources necessary for each site;
- general administration requirements such as:
  - o documentation of policies and procedures including outcomes and milestones;
  - o collection of progress data and results;
  - o setting out outcomes that are relevant to the students and their positive futures;
  - o monitoring student activity post programme for as long as possible;
  - o carrying out internal audits and reviews on a regular basis;
  - o reporting on results to community and funding stakeholders;
  - o carrying out entry and exit surveys of parents/caregivers and students to establish improvements in satisfaction.



## CHAPTER 4 – PARTNERSHIPS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The success of the CEP, and by implication that of any Flexible Learning Centre, is not only dependent upon internal (best practice) activities, but also upon quality levels of community engagement. These more externalised practices are central to a sustainable future.

### 4.1 Advocacy

The establishment of educational outreach programmes is an evolutionary process. It typically begins informally, arises from an anecdotal sense of need, and is usually commenced on the grounds of advocacy to address such need. Motivation exists to explore options and the gathering of 'like minded' people towards action is often the starting point. In the example of the Christian Brothers' CEP initiative, this advocacy drew meaning from the mission of the Religious Institute and the individual commitment and action of a few Brothers and lay colleagues.

### 4.2 Mission Articulation

Educational programmes that are delivered within Flexible Learning Centres will reflect the particular philosophy of education that their overall governing authority espouses. Clarification of this philosophy will be important as providers will be expected to situate their educational efforts within a framework that is relevant, acceptable and professional.

### 4.3 Community Needs Assessment

Central to the establishment of need is the determination of two basic data sets: student profiling and the extent of service provision.

Student profiling incorporates: general descriptive information (e.g., age, gender, attendance, location); learning needs (e.g. literacy, numeracy); extent of relationship development; vocational experiences; and the gathering of social and psychological information (abilities, social circumstances, level of motivation, health and welfare factors). Emergent from this assessment is the generation of a hierarchy of learning needs and the establishment of support to nurture development along the domains identified. This is usually in the form of an Individualised Education Plan (IEP).

The second factor in an assessment of community needs is the determination of current service provision and the particular relationship this has with the needs identified. Not only is it important to identify particular agencies in support of disengaged young people, it is also valuable to assess the extent of cooperative effort that can be harnessed to meet the identified needs.

### 4.4 Development and Levels of Support

Flexible Learning Centres may develop with variable levels of support. Important to the support offered is the management of the educational programme and the identification of the 'lead provider' in whom overall coordination is vested.

Assistance with the development of Flexible Learning Centres may include:

- sharing policy and educational frameworks;
- provision of consultative services;
- establishment of partnerships with state authorities as lead provider;
- establishment of partnerships with Catholic Education Offices as lead provider;
- establishment of partnerships with agencies with Edmund Rice Education as lead provider.

#### **4.5 Multi Agency Connections**

Responding to needs that are significant, complex and long standing requires networks and support from a cross-section of agencies. Professional partnerships based on an understanding of responsibilities together with a recognition of multiple skills underpin this multi agency approach.

The experience of the Centre Education Programme identifies the critical connection with the Department of Education and the Arts, and in turn, partner schools covered by this organisation and other Government departments associated with health, justice, accommodation and welfare interests of students.

#### **4.6 Programme Planning**

Programme planning entails a detailed set of tasks inclusive of:

- goal establishment;
- determination of nature of service;
- location of delivery;
- resourcing;
- legal and industrial coverage;
- timetabling;
- evaluative practices;
- staffing;
- financing;
- administrative and governance relationships.

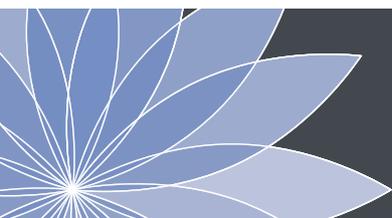
The results of planning activity can be reflected in a 'Partnership Development Plan', which, in turn, requires review and endorsement from appropriate multi-agency personnel.

## **CHAPTER 5 – CONSULTATION**

St Francis Xavier Province, Queensland has declared an interest in supporting the development of Flexible Learning Centres. These initiatives are informed by the model of the CEP and the best practice ideas that have evolved over twenty years of experience.

The administrative support of Flexible Learning Centres is complex because of the multiple agencies involved and the multi-disciplinary approaches associated with interventions. Currently, examination of a model which builds network support, consistent administration and connection among centres is being explored. It is anticipated each new centre will seek separate educational registration and be oversighted within the one corporate governance entity.

The ideas presented in this paper complement other educational planning information. They are offered as a basis for discussion and as a means for documenting some elements of significance to flexible learning provision.



## EDMUND RICE EDUCATION LOGO

### EDUCATING THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF THE YOUNG



**Circle:** Inclusive and embracing.

**Motto:** Education for Liberation refers to the Gospel, especially John 10:10  
"I have come so that you may have life in abundance", and the Charism of Edmund Rice, the Founder of the Christian Brothers.

**Lettering:** A Celtic style is used to highlight the Irish origins of the Congregation of Christian Brothers.

**Colours:** Green from the liturgical colour of Ordinary Time, which is a time of hope.  
White & Gold: liturgical colours of Easter, Resurrection, the death that leads to liberation for all.  
Green and gold are the official colours of Australia, taken from the Wattle on the national coat of arms.  
Red: The dream of Edmund Rice has been sown in the red Australian soil and continues to grow here.

**Celtic cross:** Links the logo to the Congregation Crest and situates our work in the context of the mission of the Congregation of Christian Brothers.

**Heart:** Links to the Chapter directions (2002); *The Heart of Being Brother*. More centrally it links with the phrase that has come to us from the Edmund story: Live Jesus in our hearts. Forever! To have the awareness of Jesus in our hearts, at the core of our being, is to experience liberation and to become a compassionate person.

