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## *The Leadership Programme at Kormilda College by David Dadswell and Derek Hunter*

Kormilda College in Darwin is a secondary school serving the people of northern Australia. The college is independent, co-educational, multicultural, day and residential. The college maintains as a priority the provision of a full secondary education for Indigenous students from remote communities in Australia's Northern Territory. CRA Ltd, a large metals extraction and refining corporation which has since become part of Rio Tinto plc, saw Kormilda as a significant potential partner in developing self-management and leadership amongst young Australians. This was particularly seen as an investment in young Indigenous Australians.

The then-CRA Ltd and Kormilda College signed an agreement in 1995, which has supported a wide range of initiatives in the school. Work has been undertaken in self-management of health issues, information technology, reconciliation and the affirmation of cultural identity, skills development in sport and the promotion of academic achievement through scholarships. Student leadership is promoted through a variety of large and small initiatives from an international yacht race and a solar car race across the continent to many local community projects. Major conferences on reconciliation involving participants from all across Australia and from all sections of society have been organised, relying to a large extent on student leadership.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the Kormilda College Leadership and Lifeskills Development Programme (from now on referred to as the 'leadership programme'), an initiative that comes under this agreement. The leadership programme became a tripartite intervention with the involvement of Macdonald Associates, a management consultancy that had been working with Rio Tinto companies for some years.

### **The Kormilda College leadership and lifeskills development programme**

The leadership programme's purpose is to improve the quality of student leadership and team membership within the college, particularly amongst Aboriginal students. Rio Tinto's focus is on developing such skills in Aboriginal students for the benefit of Aboriginal communities and so an original condition on the programme was that Aboriginal participation should be 70 per cent. This has since been amended to 50 per cent and combined with an equal distribution for male and female students.

The Macdonald modelling depends on a comprehensive approach within any organisation. Initiatives in, for example, leadership can only be implemented successfully if other features of the organisation such as systems, structure and staffing are designed and operated in a way which supports the leadership work. Therefore in the design phase of the leadership

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programme, the systems design methodology used by Macdonald with many commercial organisations was used to ensure that the system was robust and effective, well regarded, increasingly integrated with the rest of the school's systems, and continued to achieve the purpose originally envisaged.

The leadership programme is an initiative driven from the highest level of the college by the principal with the agreement of the board. This means that, as an organisation-wide system, authority lies at the appropriate level to make sure that other systems and policies in the school support the leadership programme. For example, the staff of the school are being taken through their version of the Working Together course. This means that when students on the programme who have understood the value of clear task assignment challenge a teacher about the way a classroom or homework assignment has been given, the teacher can respond by using the task assignment modelling they and the students had both been taught.

The leadership programme is designed to develop students over a number of years, the exact timing of which depends on the capability and progress of the individual student. It is made up of a number of elements constituting an incremental build up of theoretical input and practical experimentation and application. The programme takes the student through three phases that take in total a minimum of 18 months. It is this integrated approach that predicts a more effective adoption of the skills and behaviours. The assumption is that students will learn more easily when they experience success in applying the modelling and receive coaching in using the models both as behavioural tools and as analytical instruments. Training courses alone are not enough.

Phase One starts with attendance at a Working Together 1 course, a residential course that introduces the key concepts of team leadership and membership based on similar courses used in industry. The way the Working Together course has been developed and adapted for use with students will be described in detail later in this article.

Having been exposed to the modelling, which provides both skills and analytical tools, students are asked to apply the modelling in a project where they are a team member. This may be any activity where they are working with other people – sport, community work, music, dance or drama, part-time work, student council and so on. Each student has a member of staff, academic, residential or administrative, who is involved with the programme to act as their supervisor. This supervisor will monitor their progress and provide support and advice along the way.

The third part of the first phase is a series of communications skills workshops dealing with, for example, public speaking and possibly negotiation skills, conflict resolution and anger management.

Any appropriate extra activities such as a First Aid course, Duke of Edinburgh Award work, Bronze Medallion life saving courses, involvement in school productions will also be taken into consideration in the programme.

A student who is seen to have worked through Phase One successfully will move on to Phase Two. This involves attendance at a Working Together 2 course in which students are exposed to more of the Leadership modelling and have an opportunity to reflect on and hone their skills.

The project in this phase involves applying the modelling to an activity in which the student is a leader. This may be something new or it may be something they are already involved in. Examples for this might be as an elder in a community group in the residences, leading a dance troupe, or being captain of a sports team. The communication skills workshops continue and build on learning from Phase One.

Phase Three is entirely devoted to a project in which the student is a leader and is held accountable for the project's outcome. For example, a student may be leading the production of a school magazine. If the magazine is not produced he or she would be expected to tell people why not and to give the money back to the sponsors. In Phases Two and Three the students continue to have supervisors to monitor and coach as they progress.

The principle is that students progress at their own pace. This may sometimes be compromised to a certain extent by the need to have equal numbers on Working Together courses or when the courses can be run.

Recruitment to the programme depends on students applying. This may be on their own initiative but may be as a result of a member of the academic or residential staff asking them to think about the possibility of being part of the programme. Selection is not automatic. Students' applications are vetted according to their reasoning for wanting to be involved and their behaviour in the school over a range of activities.

## The Working Together courses

The two Working Together courses are based on Macdonald Associates Working Together courses as used in a range of commercial and not for profit organisations over many years. Through the courses in other organisations participants are introduced to a model of team membership and leadership, how to assign tasks clearly, the notion of work as the exercise of discretion and its connection with well-being, authorities and accountabilities in organisations, values, mythologies and culture, and the importance of systems, symbols and behaviour as leadership tools. Through outdoor and indoor activities and case study work participants gain experience in applying the modelling. The Kormilda initiative was the first time these courses had been used systematically with a group of young people. The course, however, had been used in a variety of possibly analogous settings, such as in Aboriginal communities, Hispanic workforces, and workforces where literacy could not be assumed.

After considered discussion it was felt right that the content of the course should not be compromised for the students. The models' integration is important to their effectiveness. However, it was clear that attention would need to be given to the pace of the introduction of the material, to the mixture of delivery – visual and verbal, classroom based and physical activity based, space given for the different learning and problem-solving styles of Indigenous and non-Indigenous. (See the Appendix for a sample timetable).

It is important that the courses are safe and fun but the level of challenge has been daunting for many students. Schools tend to reward leadership of a charismatic and technical nature. As the course focuses on good social process and teamwork in which every team member's contribution is sought and valued, those who have been 'natural leaders', 'top of the class' or 'leading scorer' have found it difficult when they do not achieve the same level of success with their accustomed ease. The challenge of these courses is significant for students of all backgrounds. For this reason amongst others there are normally at least four staff members on the course with 12 participants who monitor the social process on the course carefully and continually.

A major learning tool on the courses is the outdoor exercises – physical and intellectual problems to solve by good use of the human resources in your team according to the modelling. The exercises are those used on Working Together courses with adults in other organisations. The level of success in finding and implementing solutions is much the same. The exercises are filmed on video cameras and students benefit from the process of reflecting on their behaviour

in the exercise both by analysing it from memory and by watching the tape. Although many students, especially some of the Indigenous students, find the process of being placed in front of a camera difficult, they enjoy watching themselves on television and laugh along with all the others at some of their own antics.

Given that many of the students do not have English as their first language, briefing notes for the exercises are handed out to the leaders before the exercise rather than relying on their ability to remember or write down what they have to do. Scoring for output on the exercises is given on a graduated scale that is explained to the leaders in the briefing. In an exercise where the teams are asked to transport a bucket of water and their team across a river, 30 points for getting halfway across the river, 85 points for getting the bucket across, 100 points for team and bucket across.

Teaching sessions are kept relatively short and broken up with group work, role play, film and television clips, games reinforcing teaching points, art and poster work, and presentations. A stock of laminated posters have been developed which are stuck up around the classroom to illustrate different areas of the modelling being taught. Credit card sized reminders of the team leader and member steps and traps are distributed. These also have acronyms which have been developed to help participants remember the steps and their order. These are used in memory games through the course.

Plenty of opportunities for relaxation, sport, quizzes and assignments for school are built into the courses. Safety is a major issue. Staff on the course need to care for the students as is appropriate for minors both on a physical and an emotional level.

The cross-cultural nature of the courses is used as a positive learning point. Emphasis is laid on the different ways people contribute in a team. Some like time to think, some like to think out loud. Some find it very difficult to stand in front of a group and present while some do it very easily. Such issues are explicitly raised, addressed and discussed and work done with the students on how to cope with and benefit from the different styles.

Non-Indigenous students often find it very difficult to be led by Indigenous students who they perceive as often slow and indecisive. Behaviour which undermines the authority of the leader is challenged vigorously in the exercise debriefs.

In the teaching of the course materials the way different people in groups see the same things differently and place often contradictory valuing on the same behaviour is a significant area of learning. For a Tiwi Islander to declare that hunting and eating dugong, a protected species, is part of his culture and birthright provokes lively debate amongst students who see themselves as environmentalists as well as culturally sensitive.

Who goes on courses and who is in which team is a sensitive issue which needs careful research and planning. Traditional Aboriginal role relationships can lead to completely inexplicable behaviour if course presenters are not aware of who is not permitted to talk to whom because of their ties of affinity.

Staffing the programme and the courses is a significant issue. Presenters on the courses need a particular mixture of understanding of the modelling, ability to observe, analyse and communicate social process (especially given the cross-cultural nature of the work), and teaching skill. In a school it might be assumed that all the teachers could do this work. This has not proved to be the case. Thus a considered strategy for recruiting, training and accrediting presenters has been put in place. Presenters are taken from across the school staff – teachers, residential and administrative. The needs of the programme and the courses place a heavy demand on staff who are already busy and who need to be covered by other hard pressed staff if they are away from school. Thus the use of staff involved in the programme needs to be carefully managed. Given that money in schools is scarce, it was seen as important

that the staff who run the programme should be able to run the programme and the courses without the need for the constant presence of expensive, external consultants. A regime has been agreed in which Macdonald Associates is involved in the training of presenters and in regular control and audit of the programme but is not present in the guise of an external presenter on each course. David Dadswell and Ian Macdonald from Macdonald Associates are still involved in presenting the staff Working Together courses and in consultancy with the college's executive team.

The programme is managed by a member of staff who is accountable for all aspects of it. Michelle Forbes-Harper was the original co-ordinator and, since she has left for another school, Lee-Anne Galvin has taken over the role, which is now combined with accountability for the range of leadership activities amongst students. For example, she also has accountability for the student council. The programme has benefited from two capable leaders who have used the modelling to identify, address and resolve the many critical issues in designing, implementing and continuing to operate a new school-wide system. This is a major piece of work and has been recognised as such by the school in terms of time allocated and reward.

## Challenges and problems

A significant and repeating problem for the programme is the attendance of Aboriginal students. Often Indigenous students do not stay in full-time education at Kormilda for as long as they should because of issues back in the community, pregnancy, family responsibilities and so on. It is frequently difficult to ensure that Aboriginal students who are booked to come on courses will arrive on the day. Careful administrative and emotional preparation needs to be applied to make sure permission is granted by parents and that students do not feel exposed and isolated.

The programme is necessarily selective. There is, in practical terms, not the opportunity for all students to become involved. Nor would all students be suitable for the programme. Questions therefore arise about how to view the programme within the range of school activities. Is it a programme for the most able in the school? Is it a programme for Indigenous students into which non-Indigenous students are generously allowed? If it is to be available to those who are not the highest achievers academically, should the approach be watered down for them? Do the differing cultures of Indigenous and non-Indigenous mean that the different groups should be treated differently and have different expectations laid on them in the programme? These issues are not specific to the courses or the leadership programme being a continuously debated issue in the school and in work with Indigenous people generally.

In the first year of the programme mythologies grew up amongst some of the staff of the college that the programme was on the one hand elitist, being closely linked with the gifted and talented programme in the school, and, on the other hand, because of the required proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students on the programme, that it was favouring Aboriginal students over deserving non-Aboriginal students. To have a programme seen as so unfair was a significant problem. The response to this has been to disentangle the leadership programme from the gifted and talented area and to explain generally that the programme is available to all who apply. However, it is clear, given Kormilda's particular role in promoting Indigenous education and the nature of the funding from Rio Tinto, that Aboriginal students are going to benefit from positive discrimination until the time comes when they are seen to be able to compete on equal terms for places on the programme.

## Outcomes and benefits

During the development phase of the Leadership and Life Skills Development Programme, the project team listed a number of desired mythologies that the course would develop among the student body and the college community in general. The aim is to have the programme seen as fair to all students, as having the courage to differentiate as necessary between students showing a proper respect for the significant cross-cultural issues existing for students and the college. It is evident that amongst students and staff alike there is a growing belief that:

- Kormilda College produces good leaders.
- Kormilda College produces good leaders from Aboriginal communities.
- The programme will increase the opportunity for cross-cultural friendships.
- The leadership programme will provide better opportunities for scholarships, traineeships and promotion.
- The programme will provide better careers prospects to all participants.
- The programme will provide Indigenous students with greater access to employment opportunities.
- Kormilda College is a leading provider of world-class education and development opportunities.

To date the leadership programme has enrolled 102 students including the initial pilot programme. Forty-three of these students are currently working towards completion of Stages 2 and 3 of the programme. Of the balance of these students who have now completed their time at the college, nine have completed Stage 2 and three Stage 3. Recruitment to the programme this year will add a further 36 students.

The decision to link the Leadership and Life Skills Development Programme to the Student Leadership (Student Representative Council) Programme in the school has given a measure by which to assess outcomes from the Leadership and Life Skills Development Programme. At this year's SRC elections it was notable that the majority of students in the senior school elected to SRC were students who have completed the leadership programme. Further, as has been highlighted earlier in this paper, potential student leaders identified for charismatic or technical leadership reasons failed to predominate in the SRC elections. Indeed, so marked was this change that there was a requirement to ensure appropriate counselling for a particular charismatic leader who was not elected to a position of senior responsibility.

It will be a number of years before it is possible to provide serious data on the outcomes for students graduating from Kormilda College who have completed the leadership programme. Anecdotal evidence is available and is clearly supportive of a view that students who have undertaken the leadership programme achieve a significant change, particularly in the area of confidence and well-being. It is generally held that Indigenous students graduating from Kormilda are well recognised within their communities. This is due to the overall educational programme of the school, which provides significant cross-cultural understandings enabling students to 'walk in two worlds'. The overlay of the leadership programme outcomes on these students is furthering the educational work of the college in providing future leadership to Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

In the past two years the college has published a statement of academic results and of placement in university or work of its year 12 students. One of the remarkable features of this document since its inception has been the fact that virtually all students are placed in one

of the two categories of work or higher education. This is an excellent outcome in which the maturing effect of the leadership programme has some responsibility.

In specific terms, students who have undertaken the leadership programme are usually easily identified in class by virtue of the modelling they use in approaching their work and in questioning their teachers and working with other students. The pervasiveness of the language associated with the modelling is strong evidence of the internalisation of the leadership theory. The fact that students practise it without hesitation is a reflection that the overall college environment has adopted the modelling as a general principle for its operation. While it will be some time before we are able to reflect more seriously on the outcome of leadership development, I have mentioned a number of perceived changes and believe that the question of leadership in the college for our students and staff has undergone positive change.

In terms of personal development, there is a general view that there is a higher level of self-esteem and self-awareness among Indigenous students who have undertaken the course. This is a particular benefit to Indigenous students where the outcomes are more marked. A significant number of the Indigenous students have undertaken the course and recognise one another for their leadership expertise that is based both in a cultural context and in the context of the leadership modelling.

It would certainly be the view of the college that the leadership programme has substantially improved the leadership opportunities and understandings for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. It has opened pathways for better understanding for reconciliation and for an affirming of cultural difference. Work of the significance of the leadership programme being implemented within a school does of course take a significant period of time before academic data on the outcomes can be provided. This will be possible in coming years.

## Appendix

### WORKING TOGETHER I – SAMPLE TIMETABLE

TIME	DAY ONE	DAY TWO	DAY THREE	DAY FOUR
07.30–08.00		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
08.00–09.00		Morning review Squares & Acronyms	Morning review Acronyms & Squares	Morning review Acronyms & Squares
09.00–10.30	Travel to Lakes Resort	Team Leadership	Authority vs Power Tools of Leadership	Video Analysis <i>Film Clip 2</i>
10.30–10.45	Settle in Morning tea	Morning tea	Morning tea	Morning tea
10.45–12.30	Welcome Introductions Team/individual shields	<i>Exercise Two Mud Crossing</i>	<i>Exercise Four Salvage Crew</i>	<i>Exercise Six Kontiki</i>
12.30–13.30	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH

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13.30–14.45	Course Process Team process Values Continua	Work and well being Team Membership	Video Analysis <i>Film Clip 1</i>	What next? Team review & participant feedback Pack up Course close 14.30
14.45–15.00	Afternoon tea	Afternoon tea	Afternoon tea	Travel to Kormilda College 15.00
15.00–17.00	<i>Exercise One Blind Crossing</i>	<i>Exercise Three Piranha Peril</i>	<i>Exercise Five Kubyashi Maru</i>	
17.00–18.00	Sport/swim Individual reflection	Sport/swim Individual reflection	Sport/swim Individual reflection	
18.00–19.00	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	
19.00–21.30	Briefing for Kontiki Recreation	Instruction for Kontiki Team performance	Preparation for Kontiki Quiz	

### WORKING TOGETHER II – SAMPLE TIMETABLE

TIME	DAY ONE	DAY TWO	DAY THREE	DAY FOUR
07.30–08.00		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
08.00–09.00		Morning review Acronyms	Morning review Acronyms	Morning review Acronyms
09.00–10.30	Travel	Task assignment	Culture and Mythologies Case study 1	Tools of Leadership Case study 2
10.30–10.45	Morning tea	Morning tea	Morning tea	Morning tea
10.45–12.30	Welcome Introductions Team/individual shield	<i>Exercise Two Rescue</i>	<i>Exercise Four Nuclear waste</i>	<i>Exercise Six Croc Creek II</i>
12.30–13.30	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
13.30–14.45	Team process Team leadership Team membership	Power and authority Video clip 1	Values continua Video clip 2	What next? Team review and Feedback Pack up Course close 14.30
14.45–15.00	Afternoon tea	Afternoon tea	Afternoon tea	Travel to Kormilda College 15.00
15.00–17.00	<i>Exercise 1 Blind Crossing II</i>	<i>Exercise Three Piranha Peril II</i>	<i>Exercise Five The Trailer</i>	
17.00–18.00	Sport/swim Individual reflection	Sport/swim Individual reflection	Sport/swim Individual reflection	
18.00–19.00	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	
19.00–21.30	Briefing for Crocodyle Creek Recreation	Instruction for Croc Creek Team performance	Preparation for Croc Creek Quiz	