



# **ReLATE**

**Reframing Learning and  
Teaching Environments**

**LOGIC AND DESIGN STATEMENT**

# The ReLATE model

ReLATE recognises the impact that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have on the developing body and brain of a child, and the lasting impacts into adulthood. It gives education professionals tools, knowledge, skills and resources that enable them to be cognisant of the impacts of adverse experiences on engagement, learning health and wellbeing.

The ReLATE model is a commitment, as a school community or system, to sustainable and positive cultural change.

## Four foundational concepts of ReLATE

### 1. Safety

ReLATE recognises safety as an essential pre-condition for quality teaching and learning. Safety is defined as having both the internal and external resources to cope with life's challenges. Safety is not only physical, but also cultural, psychological, social, moral and ethical. ReLATE mirrors evidence showing us that safety is achieved through relational trust, where teachers and other adults create emotional safety and security for students and colleagues, supporting their engagement in learning and creating environments that embrace innovation, collaboration and have clarity of purpose.

### 2. A counter-stress school environment

ReLATE fosters wellbeing by actively counteracting stress, through congruent, trauma-informed policies and practices, that empower communication and promote self-regulation.

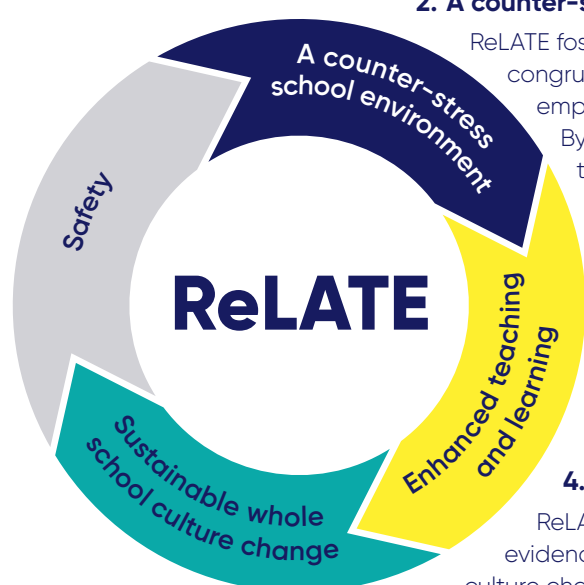
By counteracting stress, ReLATE supports schools to create improved learning environments and enables schools' strategic initiatives to flourish.

### 3. Enhanced teaching and learning

ReLATE is guided by neuroscience and enhances teaching and learning and encourages staff to use repeated, supportive actions. These actions are designed to promote the state of mind required for quality teaching and learning to take place.

### 4. Sustainable whole school culture change

ReLATE is guided by trauma-informed research and evidence that integrates our understanding of organisational culture change, resilience, adversity, mindset and collective efficacy. ReLATE supports schools to embed cultural change, resulting in greater inclusion, improved wellbeing and enhanced teaching and learning outcomes.





## Objective

ReLATE's objective is to create real, measurable and lasting change in school culture and practice. The implementation of the ReLATE model will improve the teaching, learning and wellbeing outcomes of students and staff. We believe it's not good enough to simply state these objectives. The model must deliver results.

The MacKillop Institute has partnered with Monash University to rigorously examine the design of the ReLATE model, to ensure it delivers its objectives. Together we have designed the model to set clear goals, measure results, and further enhance the model by incorporating your feedback.

### **Who is this document for?**

This document is for anyone who is thinking about, or is currently implementing, the ReLATE model within their school or education system.

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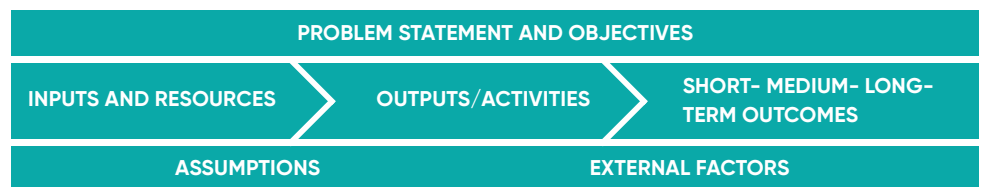


## What is 'program logic'

'Program logic' is a tool that depicts the what, why and how a program or model will work. A logic 'diagram' has several parts including inputs, outputs and outcomes, and demonstrates the linear relationship between them. A problem statement provides a brief description of the issue, context, stakeholders, and the reason for implementation. This ensures a clarity of purpose for the model. The statement also includes assumptions and external factors that could change or alter the implementation trajectory.

The program logic statement is not a static document that is completed and then shelved. It is a 'living' piece of work, designed to be consulted, revised and amended throughout the life of the model. Regular engagement with this tool is vital for a shared understanding among stakeholders, and to reduce 'drift' in implementation.

Each school should create their own individualised program logic with the template provided. Schools can develop a critical understanding of their implementation of the ReLATE model by highlighting areas of strength to address potential barriers. Developing a program logic with the help of this document creates ownership, agency and fosters democratic leadership, and helps all schools to implement ReLATE effectively.



# Program theory

'Program theory' is also referred to as a theory of change and visually represents the overarching change mechanisms within a program or model. The theory of change outlined below details a logical sequence of events that occur when the ReLATE model is implemented effectively and consistently.

**IF**

The ReLATE model is introduced and resourced appropriately, and the foundational concepts are implemented by the whole-school system

**THEN...**

An awareness of adverse childhood experiences and its impacts on children's behaviour and learning will occur system-wide.

**IF THE ABOVE IS TRUE, THEN...**

Schools are better placed to change policies, use ReLATE tools and support an educators' thinking and pedagogy in the classroom

**AND**

An educators' practice becomes more responsive, understanding, preemptive and relational.

**IF THE ABOVE IS TRUE, THEN...**

Children's social and emotional development, emotional intelligence, self-regulation and learning is better supported

**AND**

The wellbeing and confidence of students and staff is increased.

**IF THE ABOVE IS TRUE, THEN...**

The school climate, culture and community is changed and indicators of wellbeing and academic performance are improved.



## Problem Statement

Childhood adversity and complex trauma exist widely in our communities. Children are particularly vulnerable to the impact of adverse experiences, as their bodies and brains are still developing. Their learning and social development can be impaired.

As a result, their behaviours can be reactive, causing disruption to the child's learning, class peers, and whole school environments.

### **Teachers need knowledge, tools and skills to:**

- Better understand the function of dysregulated behaviour
- Prevent and de-escalate situations caused by triggers
- Recognise the impact of any adverse childhood experiences of their own
- Strengthen their own self-care and wellbeing.

### **Schools (and the systems that support them) need:**

- A shared understanding and language to strengthen collaborative practice
- To break down silos that exist within education systems
- To implement policies and practice that take into account the impacts of adverse childhood experiences.



# Goals

The model's goals are to increase the capacity of educators (and the education system as a whole) to:

## Realise

- The prevalence and impact of adverse childhood experiences
- Wellbeing is an essential prerequisite for teaching, learning and cultural change.

## Recognise

- The signs of adverse experiences, stress and trauma
- The need to better connect with and understand staff and students
- The importance of consistent, culturally appropriate, and responsive learning environments and workplaces.

## Respond

- To staff and student needs within a safe relationally focused and attuned practice
- To behaviours of concern, supporting growth and recovery.

## Resist re-traumatising

- By assisting schools to provide an environment that is safe physically, psychologically, culturally, and spiritually for staff and students.

*(Adapted from The 4 R's: SAMHSA, 2014)*

## PARTICIPATION

Groups involved with the ReLATE model are:

- All staff at the school level (including leadership, administrative and support staff)
- Students
- Educational system staff and personnel
- Parents
- Community agencies.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

## Actively supported

Support is overtly provided for change, and is a purposeful effort. It may be in the form of leadership, time, resources, policy expression or popular vote.

## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and trauma

Experience of childhood adversity impact on student engagement, learning, health and wellbeing. Childhood trauma (the result of overwhelming experiences that trigger prolonged activation of stress and survival responses such as fight/flight/freeze) can derail healthy development, alter brain architecture, and social capacity.

## Attachment

Attachment theory is a psychological, evolutionary and ethological theory concerning relationships between humans. The most important tenet is that young children need to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for normal social and emotional development. Bonding is an intrinsic human need that supports regulation of emotions and development of trust in others, and promotes adaptiveness and growth.

## Attunement

Attunement is the reactivity we have to another person. It is the process by which we form relationships. Attunement comes across as genuinely caring; it's deeply listening and caring about student's responses and 'actively noticing' students' mood, or when they're unusually quiet, or when they're struggling to focus. We need attunement to feel secure and to develop well, and to feel close and connected; to feel 'seen' by others.

## Audited

Conducting an audit involves an identifying and investigating policies, practices and services for their alignment with new ways of thinking and working.

## Counter-stress environments

Counter-stress environments proactively build wellbeing, trust and safety. At the core of a counter-stress classroom is a caring, engaging teacher who establishes authentic trusting relationships with each student. At the core of counter-stress schools is attuned, actively supportive leadership and collegial support. Collective care is experienced, there is co-operation, a sense of team, togetherness, respect, collaboration, empowerment and inclusivity. Differences or conflicts are resolved in ways that retain dignity, and relational disruption is repaired. There are system-wide processes to respond to every day and unexpected stressors. The effects of cumulative stress on individuals and on systems are understood. School processes include active supports and preventative strategies. Communication is clear, inclusive and kind.

## Collaborative communities of practice

A community of practice (CoP) approach to teaching and learning in education provides a space for staff to collaboratively reflect, review and regenerate their current teaching and learning practices. Communities of practice grow, or are fostered, to provide a space around shared interests and concerns and can include school clusters and broader groups in education.

## Culturally safe

A culturally safe environment is one that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together. Alternatively, culturally unsafe practices are those that diminish, demean or dis-empower the cultural identity and wellbeing of an individual. Strategies that enhance the ability to be culturally safe include: reflecting on one's own culture, attitudes and beliefs about 'others'; clear, value free, open and respectful communication developing trust; recognising and avoiding stereotypical barriers; teachers and students demonstrate mutual respect; manage behaviour that might stimulate 'classroom incivilities'; establish inclusive class ground rules that safeguard against racism and harassment; and treat diversity positively.

## Culturally responsive

Culturally responsive teaching is about making school learning relevant and effective for learners by drawing on students' cultural knowledge, life experiences, frames of reference, languages, and performance and communication styles. This means making what students know, and how they know it, the foundation of learning and teaching interactions and curriculum. This is good for all students, but particularly so when there are significant differences between the world of the teacher and the world of the child. Culturally responsive teaching recognises and deeply values the richness of the cultural knowledge and skills that students bring to the classroom as a resource for developing multiple perspectives and ways of knowing. Teachers communicate, validate and collaborate with students to build new learning from students' specific knowledge and experience. Empowerment and power-sharing are integral to relational and cultural responsiveness.

## Distributive leadership

Distributed leadership is primarily the practice of leadership rather than specific leadership roles or responsibilities; leadership by expertise rather than leadership by role or years of experience. It equates with shared, collective and extended leadership practice that builds the capacity for change and improvement, moving away from independence associated with those with formal leadership roles or responsibilities, to interdependence. Genuine distributed leadership requires high levels of trust, transparency and mutual respect.

## Educator

School leadership, teaching, administration and support staff.

## Feedback literacy

Understanding the emotional and motivational impact of feedback on students and colleagues; how to listen, understand the perspective of the student/staff, and provide feedback that enhances growth (academic, behavioural, wellbeing, identity).

## Identity responsive

An inclusive environment where all students and families are welcome and respected. Students are encouraged to be their whole selves; honouring their culture(s), sense of self and life. Safe opportunities are created for learners to articulate and express their developing identities. Genuine efforts are made to ensure staff reflect the diverse race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, language and special needs of the young people being served.

## Maintained

When a predetermined level of achievement has been met and is now being sustained, because it is embedded within systems and expectations.

## ReLATE

Reframing Learning and Teaching Environments, a trauma-responsive school-wide approach.

## Four foundational concepts of the ReLATE model

**Safety:** Recognised as the essential precondition to learning established through relational trust. Safety includes multiple domains – physical, cultural, psychological, social, moral and ethical.

**A counter-stress school environment:** Environments of wellbeing that actively counter stress using trauma-informed policies and practices that empower communication and promote self-regulation

**Enhanced teaching and learning:** Based on neuroscience and using repeated supportive actions to promote a state of mind that enables quality teaching and learning.

**Sustainable whole-school culture change:** Integrated understanding of organisational culture change, resilience, adversity, mindset and collective efficacy informed by trauma research and embeds culture-change – improved inclusion, wellbeing and teaching and learning outcomes.



## ReLATE circle

ReLATE Circles are a multi-functional tool improving emotional intelligence, grounds individuals in the present, supports purposeful goal-directed actions and optimism; develop interdependence, help-seeking, and help-giving and relational trust; and a personally meaningful desire to achieve.

ReLATE Circles are framed around four questions:

- How are you feeling about school or work today?
- What is one thing you want to achieve today?
- If you need support, who will you ask?
- Why is what you want to achieve important to you?

## Relational pedagogy

A universal approach to teaching and learning which influences whole school ethos, systems and policy as well as everyday practice. Relational pedagogies draw on the relationships, interactions, communication and interconnection of people, places and things in children's sociocultural contexts to enhance and extend children's learning and development. Aims to build authentic relationships, relational trust and relational capacity via increased positive attachment experiences, and an intentionality to connect with and understand students; requiring reliability, predictability, consistency, deep listening and empathy.

## Restorative practice

A way of dealing with incidents of harm that emphasises taking responsibility for the effect of your behaviour on others, and trying to do something that makes things better for those you harmed.

## School Implementation Taskforce (SIT)

SIT comprises a diverse and integral group of school leaders and staff who have been nominated (usually by the Principal or system leader). The SIT members champion and lead implementation, supported by clear guidelines. They detail each of the key tasks needed to create lasting change, how the changes will be managed and what steps are needed to maximise the chances of success. SIT use data to inform thinking, examine values, beliefs and assumptions, and contextualise resources for the community.

## Stress

Stress is a normal reaction the body has when changes occur, resulting in physical, emotional and intellectual responses. Understanding our own responses to stressful situations, and our triggers helps to identify stress management strategies, allowing us to deal with things in a healthier manner. Toxic stress response can occur when a child or adult experiences strong, frequent and/or prolonged adversity which results in changes to their baseline state.

## Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA)

USA government organisation that gives information on substance use and mental health, services, research and intervention widely accessible. Includes advisory councils, committees and resources.

## Stress management plans

These plans support educators, students, and carers to work together to identify and document triggers for stress and distress and plan effective de-escalation strategies.

## Wellbeing

Wellbeing can be described as judging life positively and feeling good. Wellbeing integrates mental health and physical health, it includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, quality of relationships, feeling connected, feelings of safety, fulfilment and positive functioning, and having positive coping strategies. Wellbeing is a broad construct which can be conceptualised and measured in a variety of ways. Self-reports are important as wellbeing is highly subjective. Mental wellbeing is essentially feeling good, functioning well and feeling connected.

## Windows of Tolerance (WoT)

We all experience what is known as a 'window of tolerance', a state of physical and emotional arousal that is tolerable and bearable. When a student is within their window of tolerance, they can think, learn, be a friend and relax. When outside the boundaries of their WoT, it becomes increasingly difficult to problem solve or take learning risks (attempt new tasks that you may fail at); thinking or behaviour has become disrupted by intensified emotional and physiological arousal. Behaviours during these times are not normally chosen, and a lack of flexibility in responses is common. Either excessive rigidity or chaos are typical during these dysregulated episodes. Tolerance levels can be expanded enabling students (and everyone) to cope, to stay more regulated and be able to engage/learn when experiencing challenges or stressors.

This document was developed in partnership with:



The MacKillop Institute acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we stand and pay our respects to the Elders, past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures, hopes and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Also, we acknowledge the grief and loss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have endured from the harm caused by invasion and colonisation over the last 200 plus years resulting in historical, cultural and intergenerational trauma.

The MacKillop Institute recognise, respect and celebrate the survival and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including recognition of those whose ongoing effort to protect and promote the world's oldest living culture will leave a lasting and proud legacy for their people.

We stand with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in solidarity now and always.

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