

The Real Game Series

Bringing Real Life to Classrooms Around the World

"It was amazing to see that amount of enthusiasm from students who struggle through a normal school day!" (Teacher)

The Real Game Series (www.realgame.com) is a set of six innovative, world-class programs designed to bring interactive, experiential learning to classroom and group settings to increase students' perceptions of the relevance and importance of their school experience. The Series and the partnership framework used to create and implement these programs have made an exciting contribution to education in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia and several other countries.

How The Real Game Series Was Born

"What if we could give young people a practice run at being an adult while they're still in school - something that feels like the real world they'll soon be part of?"

That's what Bill Barry, from Newfoundland, Canada, asked when his 12 year old daughter, Mara, complained that some of things she was learning in school just didn't seem useful or relevant in terms of her personal career dreams. Bill set out to develop an engaging tool that would make learning about careers and work fun and interesting. The result was The Real Game designed for 12 to 14 year olds that was piloted in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1994. It created such interest that the program was presented to career specialists from across Canada later that year in Ottawa. In the six years since, the Real Game has evolved into a series of six internationally-recognized career building programs serving over 3 million young people at any given time in ten countries.

How the Real Game Works

This game is really fun. I learned how to co-operate and work with other people (5th Year Student). . . . I thought my parents didn't like me because they kept saying no to the Reeboks. Now I'm playing The Real Game, I can't understand how they have been able to say yes so often (7th Year Student)... I found out that a person's career is not decided completely on their skills. Their attitude is really important. And most people, me included, have hidden talents that will be useful for a future job (9th Year Student).

The Framework: The Real Game Series consists of six separate programs, each of which is tailored to a specific range of age and grade levels. The basic aim of the Series is to introduce realities of the adult world of work in a meaningful way and to help participants master the life/career building competencies outlined in the Canadian *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* (www.blueprint4life.ca) and the U.S. National Career Development Guidelines (www.acrnetwork.org/ncdg.htm).

The Blueprint/Guidelines competency framework is a template against which the Real Game Series has been created. All the exercises and activities of the TRG Series have been keyed to the competencies outlined in the Blueprint and Guidelines in the three areas of 1) Personal Management, 2) Learning and Work Exploration, and 3) Career Building.

Programs and Target Groups: The following table lists each program, with the age and grade levels it covers.

PROGRAM	YEARS/GRADES	AGES
The Play Real Game	3 to 4	8 to 10
The Make It Real Game	5 to 6	10 to 12
The Real Game	7 and 8	12 to 14
The Be Real Game	9 and 10	14 to 16
The Get Real Game	11 and 12	16 to 18
Real Times, Real Life	Post-secondary	Adults

Each of the programs is packaged into a binder that includes all teacher and student materials (including overhead transparencies, posters, and reproducible masters) needed to implement the programs for as many participants as desired, year after year. The programs can be easily localized, and they take anywhere from 15 to 30 or more hours. Duration is flexible, depending on inclusion of optional components and involvement of community organizations, and the requirements of specific settings. The Real Game Series is used in primary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, one-stop career resource and employment service sites, vocational rehabilitation and workers' compensation settings, outplacement and corporate human resource offices, correctional institutions, military settings and community volunteer agencies.

Playing the Real Game: Every program provides a personal career-building context that participants and facilitators at all levels find enjoyable and stimulating. Each game in the series incorporates increasingly challenging ideas and vocabulary, and provides all participants with unique life and work roles. The games focus on teamwork and community interactions, involving parents throughout the process. They employ challenging, engaging, and entertaining learning techniques proven effective in thousands of classrooms.

Through playing the games in the series, participants will:

- learn life and career building concepts and vocabulary
- take on and play life and work roles
- create and act within a simulated community and society
- learn to locate and use career and labour market information
- explore occupations and lifestyles
- learn how to budget time and money
- examine the relationship between school courses and future goals
- survey the changing world of work
- "experience" job loss and work search

- learn how to set goals in all aspects of life and monitor progress
- learn how to prepare for life and work transitions
- learn and practise personal management and employability skills

Through playing the games, students (and teachers) get dramatic new insights into the relevance of the curriculum to future life and work opportunities. They unfailingly see relevance and connections not obvious to them before. They begin clearly to see why their Math(s), Science and English lessons are important to their lives, not just to get over the next educational hurdle.

In addition, other career and learning resources enjoy increased impact when used with The Real Game Series. For example, when students have just received "redundancy notices" and lost their jobs in the game, they are more likely to take the issues of job search, resume preparation and research of alternatives to heart. Computer and Internet-based career information systems, tests, print career information resources, personal networking and community links and resources all enjoy increased demand from and utility with TRG Series participants.

How the Real Game Works for Teachers: The Real Game Series provides a vehicle to infuse life and career building concepts into any curriculum in a way that makes sense to students, teachers, administrators and parents, without adding to educators' workloads. In fact, they enjoy this new approach, which delivers gains in learning and performance outcomes.

In the thousands of classrooms now using The Real Game Series around the world, a team-teaching approach is common. English, Math(s), Science, Home Economics, Shop or Automotive/Engineering, Geography, Social Studies, Physical Education, Business and other subject teachers, and career counselors and advisors, librarians, administrators, parent volunteers, peer facilitators (students from older grades) can all facilitate key activities in the program.

Support: Although complete and easy-to-follow lesson plans are provided for teachers and facilitators, training is highly recommended. Both students and teachers benefit more from the program if teachers participate in a one-day training session. Regional training sessions are organized regularly by the TRG Series Coordinators in Departments of Education in most partner countries. Information on training events and trainers is available via websites and in several countries teachers can obtain help with implementing the TRG Series by calling toll-free to Real Game experts who are available to give direction and advice.

Implementation of the Real Game Series

"Young people have a very different world they are now moving into, and we have got to start the process of preparing them for that world much earlier if they are going to learn the skills to be effective in that world. It's not something that can be left until after school; it's not something that can be left to the last couple of years. The Real Game Series provides a mechanism to make that happen." - Tony Watts, National Institute of Careers Education & Counselling, Cambridge, England.

The Partnership Formula: An innovative approach to partnerships has been the “winning formula” for implementing The Real Game Series. This partnering strategy requires involvement from respected organizations and individuals with solid reputations in education and effective networks across the countries that wish to implement the program.

A “TRG Series Partnership Framework” outlines the roles and responsibilities of all partners involved in the development and implementation of these programs. This Framework has been instrumental in attracting international partners. The Framework itself involves fifteen distinct development and implementation phases all partners adhere to. The phases include the general areas of program conception and definition, prototype development, piloting, evaluation/revisions, and implementation.

A Comprehensive Piloting Process: A unique approach to program piloting has also been a key factor to the success of the TRG Series. Once a prototype program is developed and ready for piloting, hundreds of students, teachers and parents are “deputized” as co-developers and contribute to the development, evaluation and revision processes. Pilot sites must apply to participate in the program and show commitment to be involved.

In Canada and the U.S., for each program in the TRG Series, at least 100 pilot sites (50 in each country) from coast-to-coast have participated, involving over 5,000 individuals and 125,000 hours of focus testing over two to three months. Pilot participants’ (students, teachers, parents and community members) role is to “play” the entire game, then advise the developers how it can be improved and customized to the Country needs. Feedback from all pilot sites (thousands of pages) is then reviewed and incorporated into the final product that invariably becomes much richer than the piloted edition. Given this in-depth pilot testing, users of the TRG Series can be confident that these programs meet real needs of teachers and students.

International Implementation: The National Life/Work Centre partners with national governments, not with individual states/provinces, universities or publishing companies. Once a partnership agreement is in place with an appropriate national agency in a new country, one or more programs in the TRG Series are then adapted to the country’s cultural and economic realities. Program conception, development, piloting and launching usually involve at least a 12 to 16 month process before a new national edition of any TRG Series program is launched and distributed. The pilot process described above is standard for any international adaptation. In addition, international partners have agreed that the series needs to be financially self-sustaining, on a not-for-profit basis, and that all partner countries will freely share their experiences and innovations with these programs.

Impact of The Real Game Series

“The Blueprint/Guidelines - Real Game Series combination is redefining the landscape of career education. Together, they are infusing the notions of life and career building across the spectrum of primary and secondary curriculum.”

Phil Jarvis, National Life/Work Centre, Canada

Building on a recognized competency framework and career building principles: As these programs have been created in conformity with the Blueprint/Guidelines competency and performance indicator framework, they have immediate face-validity and measurability. Practitioners who use The Real Game Series can be confident these programs help students develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need for effective career development. Moreover, the "High Five" Guiding Principles (1. Believe in yourself and follow your heart; 2. Change is constant; 3. Learning is lifelong; 4. Focus on the journey, not the destination; and 5. Access your allies, be an ally - or helping hands) are embedded in all programs in the series.

Bringing real life to learning: The success of the program also highlights the need to offer relevant, experiential career development learning opportunities to young people. All TRG Series programs use role-playing, future activities, simulations, and community resources that relate to life and work decisions and situations. Integrating these activities and experiences into engaging "games" that are fun and meaningful to play is a key ingredient in the phenomenal success of the TRG Series. Educators everywhere can use these concepts to bring real life into their classrooms and learning environments.

The TRG Series Vision: A Life and Career Building Culture

Healthy self-reliant citizens: It is the collective vision of the TRG Series partners that these programs will eventually be experienced by most students at multiple points during their primary and secondary educational journey, and adults in career transitions will have ready access to adult editions. The TRG Series partners view these programs as key Blueprint-coded resources to support and enhance curriculum to produce healthy, self-reliant citizens - the ultimate goal of education. The programs can also make a significant contribution to enhancing school-home-community partnerships, and along with other exemplary career development resources, contribute to the establishment and nurturing of a life and career building culture in communities across entire nations.

An international vision: We live and work in a global economy. To succeed in this world of constant change where workers will have to make dozens of transitions in their careers, individuals need new knowledge, skills and attitudes. The Real Game Series is dedicated to helping people develop the life and career building skills everyone now needs to prosper in the global labour market - skills that are now as important as foundation academic and technical skills. Through The Real Game Series global partnership, an international vision of helping all young people and adults develop the skills they need to succeed in their chosen life and work paths is emerging.