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Hume global learning village: a creative learning community

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Structured Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the paper is to document the development of the Hume Global Learning Village from the establishment of the Safe City Task Force, the building of the Hume Global Learning Centre, the development of the Hume Global Learning Village Concept, the academic and other partnerships, research and learning activities that this supports. It outlines the vision and learning strategies that underpin the development of the HGLV, and concludes with factors that have contributed to keeping Village members involved and provides an indication of future developments.

Design/methodology/approach – The approach is a practical outline of a local government partnership with higher education in the context of a geographic learning community that has led to the development of a 20 year strategy for learning.

Originality/value – The value of this paper is that it provides an opportunity to stimulate thinking about local government and its role in learning which is not a traditional role. The key to this is the linkages with higher education especially in terms of access to research capacity and learning which contributes to policy about relevant topics such as lifelong learning, social and emotional learning, youth, secondary school regeneration, active ageing and so forth.

Practical implications – The outcomes of the HGLV development demonstrate the strong link between economic development and the practical applications for those communities where education results are lower than average. Increasing the participation rate of the population involved in learning contributes to economic development and provides a more socially inclusive society.

Keywords – learning community, Hume Global Learning Village, lifelong learning.

Paper type – Practical Paper

1 Introduction to Hume City

Hume City is located on the urban-rural fringe, just 20 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, Victoria. Its 504 square kilometres comprise approximately 65 percent rural land, 25 percent urban land and 10 percent occupied by the Melbourne Airport. It covers the regions of Sunbury, Craigieburn and Broadmeadows. Within those regions there are a number of industries including Melbourne International Airport, freight, engineering, automotive manufacturing, steel, plastics, electronics, communications and tourism.

It has a population of 164,000. It has a very culturally diverse population with over 140 nationalities speaking 125 languages other than English at home, with 28.8% of the population being foreign born. In addition, the indigenous community is 0.6% of the population which is higher than the Melbourne average (HCC 2006). The City has a large number of young people, with 32.5 percent of its residents aged 19 years and under, while 8.1 percent are aged 65 years and above. It is also a multi-faith community, with many religions practised in Hume.

Within the City of Hume, the Broadmeadows SLA has significantly lower levels of educational attainment when compared to the metropolitan Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD). Almost one in five residents has only completed secondary college to Year 8 (age 14) or less. Factors such as lower levels of education, cultural and language barriers, other inequalities and barriers such as higher levels of disability and significantly lower levels of home internet access are strong negative contributors to this demographic.

Nonetheless, it is noted in the report *Melbourne's North – a New Knowledge Economy* that Hume City is a growth area. It enjoys rapid population growth and has new opportunities to emerge as a knowledge economy, while including the retention of a high-tech manufacturing base. By 2030 the population of Hume City Council is predicted to climb to 242,000. The suburb of Broadmeadows has been identified by the State Government of Victoria as one of 5 Central Activities Districts around Melbourne and is targeted for substantial CBD type growth including several hundred new white collar jobs, while the outer areas provide Greenfield site opportunities for incubator developments (NIEIR, 2009). The challenge is to ensure that local citizens benefit not only in terms of having the skills to take advantage of employment opportunities, but that regard is given to an inclusive society and one that values the environment. These are the drivers of Hume City as a creative learning community.

2 Hume City as a Learning Community

Australia now has a decade of practice in the development of Learning Communities of Place and Hume City and the Hume Global Learning Village is often quoted as a good practice example in the development of a Learning Community in Australia (Kearns, Longworth et al. 2008). In fact, during this time, led by the Safe City Taskforce, chaired by Frank McGuire, Hume City took a radical and positive approach to community building by focusing on learning as the key to social and economic wellbeing for all citizens. McGuire notes that the three foci of attitude, education and opportunity and “having a go” are what underlie the spirit of the Hume Global Learning Village (HGLV) today.

McGuire secured key partnerships and funding to establish the Hume Global Learning Centre (HGLC) and HGLV with the support of the Victorian Government, the Pratt Foundation, The Age and the Ford Motor Company.

A founding feature of the HGLV was the establishment of the first public library in Broadmeadows known as the Hume Global Learning Centre. It has become a beacon of

learning for Hume City. As the Federal Minister for Calwell, Maria Vamvakinou MP, noted in a speech to Parliament in 2009 this building is a wonderful and unique example of a genuine community centre of learning, and hence social inclusion. It is an iconic building that visibly celebrates learning. At the same time, other community infrastructure such as a health services hub around maternal and childcare, the Visy Cares Learning Centre in Meadow Heights was also established.

An important factor is that the HGLV development has been driven at the Local Government level. The Hume City Council's vision for Hume is a prosperous, sustainable and vibrant city; renowned for social justice, lifelong learning and community inclusion. Hume was the first Council in Australia to adopt a Social Justice Charter and a Bill of Rights. The Council takes the view that economic and social development issues are inextricably linked, and that partnerships and innovative collaboration benefit the community.

The learning vision articulated for Hume City in the Council Plan 2030 is to;

Enhance life experience, employment opportunities and contributions to the community by inspiring and facilitating the participation of Hume residents in lifelong learning, regardless of age, ability or ethnicity, resulting in reduced disadvantage and improved quality of life.

The vision was developed by Hume City Council, residents and members of the Hume Global Learning Village (HGLV) and emphasizes the importance of valuing learning in all its forms (formal, informal and non formal) and embedded in many different settings – the family, the community, the school and the workplace. Learning involves change which is undertaken on an individual basis or as a social activity (Wheeler and Faris, 2006).

Lifelong learning fosters the lifespan and life-wide learning, that is, all the phases of life from early childhood, to school years, to the adult learner and the older learner, and all areas of learning. It cultivates democratic values and according to Faris should build human and social capital including aboriginal value and knowledge base (Faris 2006). The operation of Hume City's lifelong learning agenda is through the Hume Global Village Network.

3 Hume Global Village Network background

The HGLV is a collaboration of over 700 organisations with an interest in learning in Hume City, representing schools, neighbourhood houses, libraries, TAFE's, universities, council officers, job services providers, businesses, community and sporting groups, government departments; trainers, tutors and individuals. The Hume Global Learning Village (HGLV) was established on 30 May 2003 and members began work on creating a shared strategy to increase learning opportunities and encourage lifelong learning in Hume. The role of the HGLV is as the catalyst, facilitator, leader and driver of the shared vision for Hume as a learning community.

The work of the Village members, the HGLV Advisory Board and Council has been defined by a number of strategies including the Social Justice Charter, two, three-year learning strategies - Learning Together 1 (LT1) and Learning 2 (LT2) covering the period 2004-2010 and Board and Committee Terms of Reference.

In particular, the development of each learning strategy has involved Council, residents and members of the HGLV in a creative process of consultation. The first strategy (LT1) contained 8 themes with 56 projects. At the end of 2006, before drafting LT2, HGLV members reflected on what they had learnt about working with Council on community education over that period. The enthusiasm of the Village members was

noted and one factor that was recognised was the leadership shown by Hume City Council and especially the partnership with the Learning Community Department and the Research Department to improve the evaluation process to ensure that data was relevant, timely and more targeted to meet the reporting requirements to Council and Councillors as an evidence base for future development.

The second learning strategy (LT2) became a key reference for all forms of learning opportunities in Hume for the period 2007-2010. It documented what had been successfully learnt so far, how those key findings could be improved upon and introduced new learning opportunities (HCC 2007). It incorporated five key learning themes which reflected a phases of life approach based on a German model that Kearns noted appeared relevant to Australia (Kearns 2005). The themes are:

- Inspiring lifelong learning in Hume
- The Hume Global Learning Village network
- The early years
- The school years
- The adult years
- The older years

Each theme had an outcome, a context and details of learnings so far. Each outcome had one or more Key Performance Indicators (KPI). The Hume City Council Research Department worked directly with the HGLV Research Action group on an evaluation framework that included the most effective means of collecting data including the use of resident surveys on learning. The information has informed the Learning Community Department's reporting requirements to Council.

While the data collection has become much more streamlined, the real story and the creativity lie behind the statistics. For example, a recent HGLV Advisory Board Briefing to Council noted the following achievements. This is by no means a comprehensive list.

- Increasing **lifelong learning** opportunities, for example, HGLV forums, Four Seasons of Learning, Festivals of Learning, Learning Advocate Program, Bilingual Story time, Home Library Service, an Annual Research Conference, HGLV Members and Residents Surveys.
- Promotion of **life-wide learning**, for example, Baby First Book Bag, Best Start, Bilingual Storytelling, homework clubs, Hume Youth Leadership program with Leadership Victoria, Active Aging in Hume.
- Promoting new and innovative ways of bridging the **digital divide**, for example, computer clubs, NetHelp, purchasing 22 laptops to take out into community locations for internet training, the Hume i-tech Challenge awards targeted at schools.
- **Celebrations of learning**, through the Four Seasons of Learning and Learning Festivals.
- Establishment of **new learning facilities**, for example, the Broadmeadows Schools Regeneration Project, Community Hubs, the proposed learning centre at Craigieburn.
- **Recognition of learners and educators in the community** has heightened awareness of those involved in the daily work of teaching (for example, Inspiring Teachers Scholarships) and those learners who inspire us all (for example, Inspiring Story Ambassadors).

A small sample of the activity is highlighted in the HGLV Progress Report January to March 2010 which notes that during this period an average of 28,325 people per month walked into the Hume Global Learning Centre and an average 114,674 loans per month were made. The Bilingual Storytime program was delivered to 1,241 adults and 2,761

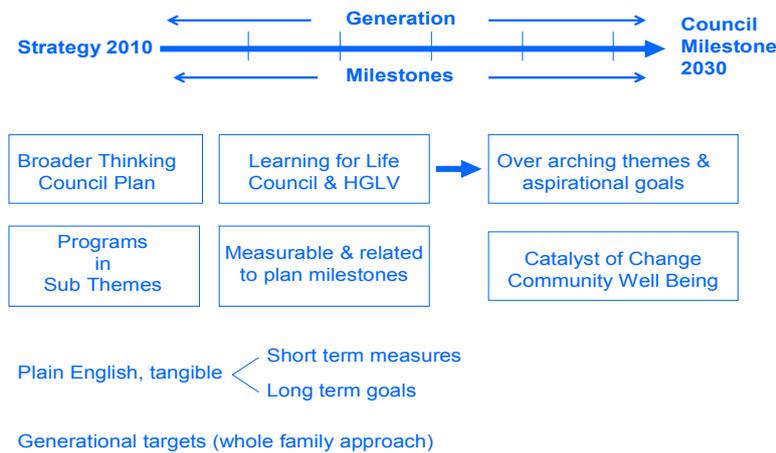
children in languages covering Arabic, Assyrian, Turkish, Vietnamese, Sinhalese while 614 First Book for Baby Bags were distributed and 624 students accessed Your Tutor Online Homework Assistance.

The work of the Village members and Hume City Council has been widely recognised at state and national level awards including in 2005 achieving the Prime Ministers Awards for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships.

3.1 Twenty year strategy

The work of Village members, residents and the Hume City Council in this area has been resoundingly endorsed by Councillors with adoption of the 3rd Generation Learning Strategy which will be a 20 year strategy, aligned with the Council Plan 2030. This longer time frame allows for innovative approaches to be developed to tackle generational issues in a more aspirational way. Within this strategy there will be a series of shorter term (3-4 year) plans which will allow for specific reporting requirements relating to time specific and tangible outcomes. The diagram below represents this intent.

Figure 1. Third Generation Learning Strategy



Source: HGLV Advisory Board 2010

3.2 Academic partnership

The partnerships with universities and the local TAFE college have been particularly important in the development of a sustainable learning community framework. As discussed in an AUCEA position paper, university-community engagement is a collaborative relationship which should lead to beneficial outcomes (AUCEA 2006). There are real benefits to universities in working in partnership with a community at all levels of endeavour, that is, research, learning, teaching, the student experience and social inclusiveness. University representatives from RMIT, Victoria University, The University of Melbourne and Kangan Institute have been involved in the HGLV from the beginning, in all areas. Academics and practitioners undertake research about their work in Hume. Hume City Council and the Village have provided work integrated and service learning experience for university students. Academics have incorporated visits to HGLV as part

of their course structure. Universities are also represented on the HGLV Committee and HGLV Advisory Committee.

This partnership is leading innovation and creativity. In particular, currently discussion is underway about:

- The development of post-secondary education in Hume including a Multiversity concept for the provision of higher education in Hume, aimed at increasing participation rates of Hume residents in higher education.
- The establishment and fostering of international bilateral links between the HGLV and like-minded initiatives around the world.
- The promotion of lifelong Social and Emotional Learning in Hume City.
- The Hume Broadband Initiative intended to provide more equitable access to low cost high speed broadband internet for residents, health, education, Not-for-Profits and small businesses.

At the grass roots level, Village members have been able to reflect on their own practice by becoming members of a Research Action Working Group - a sub-committee of the HGLV Committee. Established in 2004, the aim of the group is through an action learning/action research approach to monitor, coordinate and disseminate research findings from the Village. Village members can also be co-opted for particular expertise.

The annual Hume City Research Day¹ is one way academics and practitioners can disseminate their work. Presentations must be about research and practice that is happening in Hume City and be linked to the current learning strategy. It is an action learning/action research process and each year the quality of presentations has improved. It has gone from an initial information gathering and networking exercise, to one of exploring themes of relevance to Village members, for example, this year's theme is creativity and innovation while last year's theme was social inclusion. Now in its fifth year, it has become a fixture on the HGLV calendar and as far as we know Hume City Council is the only local government in Australia to sponsor an annual research day on learning. This year's research day was held on 27 August and the program reflected the diversity of activity that is happening. The day commenced with a keynote speaker to enthuse members and this year Tania de Jong AM, Founder of Creativity Australia and Executive Producer Creative Innovation 2010 is talking about "The Artful Human – Creativity and Lifelong learning". Village members presented on work in early childhood, youth attainment and transitions, bi-lingual story time, community hubs, the future of tertiary education in Hume City, Australian public libraries and universities in partnership, accessing training and education opportunities for CALD communities in Hume, online learning and work with disadvantaged youth.

Last year's keynote, Rhonda Galbally, AO, (CEO Our Community) really inspired participants and praised the City of Hume for investing in its learning community and congratulated Village members on the work they do. Galbally believes that an investment in learning communities can have a huge impact on the health and well-being of a community. It is about building hopeful communities, belonging communities and in control communities. The learning community can take on a number of forms - a geographic place, a network of learning organisations within that place and can also include online communities and the HGLV is developing all of these frameworks. There are structures for learning, people learning shoulder to shoulder, a sense of hope, belonging and of control.

¹ For more information on The Annual Research Conference visit the research subcommittee's web site at www.humegloballearning.vic.gov.au

The other major role of the HGLV Research Action Working Group is to assist the Hume City Council Research Department develop and monitor the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the current learning strategy (LT2). To date this has involved assistance and advice on the KPIs, the production of two Hume Residents' Learning Surveys (2008 and 2010) and a HGLV Members' Survey (2009). This work contributes to the sustainability of the learning community development and informs reports back to the Council and the rate payers.

The work on evaluation and the research day are ways that academics and community members can work together on the development of the Village concept. It is an opportunity to build the knowledge base, to provide impetus to move the HGLV agenda forward and to provide the latest knowledge in the field (local and international) and to challenge our thinking. It has been a challenge to evaluate such a complex network structure such as the Hume Global Learning Village.

3.3 What is a creative learning community?

Florida (2003) argues that creativity comes from the people. Transformation will happen when there is a mix of diverse, tolerant people open to creativity. "Creativity must be motivated and nurtured in a multitude of ways by employers, by people themselves and by communities where they locate (Florida, 2003, p5)."

Faris as an early adopter of the learning community concept notes that a learning community of place is one in which lifelong learning is explicitly used as an organizing principle and social/cultural goal in order that the learning resources across five different sectors (civic, economic, public (museums, libraries, social and health agencies), education and voluntary/community), are mobilized so that sustainable economic development and social inclusion are attained in the emerging knowledge-based economy and society (Faris 2001, 2004, 2006).

Hume City Council has now had six years of building on the Faris definition and putting the HGLV learning community concept into operation and some key factors that have been identified by Kearns and others that contribute to the sustainability of a learning community are:

- An identified community need.
- Passionate entrepreneurs with vision that inspire action and build **partnerships**.
- Key leadership role of local government.
- A management structure and strategies in place to support this.
- Clear **performance** targets and measurements.
- Communications strategy that keeps people not just informed but contributing and **participating** (Wheeler, Phillips et al. 2005; Kearns, Longworth et al. 2008).

These factors also incorporate the 3 Ps – partnerships, participation and performance as mentioned by Cara et al as critical in the development of learning communities (Cara and Ranson 1998; Faris 2001).

Kearns et al (2008) noted that learning communities provide frameworks for partnerships and innovations in communities and regions which contribute to building social, human, identify and economic capital in communities. In doing this, learning communities contribute to both inclusion and productivity objectives and widen learning opportunities for members of those communities. They note that learning communities need to develop sustainable strategies that will drive ongoing innovation, creativity and benefits. By developing a 20 year 3rd Generation Learning Strategy Hume City is putting

in a timeframe that will allow for innovative approaches and partnerships in tackling longer term learning issues.

4 Conclusion

Hume City Council plays a stewardship role in driving the learning community vision forward which is backed by significant resources. However, it cannot achieve creativity and innovation without the support of key partners, Village members and residents. The HGLV Board noted that the HGLV and Hume City Council relationship is highly interdependent. It is transforming from a hierarchical relationship to one of a network of cooperation involving Councillors, Council staff, Village members and other key stakeholders in a mutually respectful, but energetic and productive relationship. In doing this, Council is reframing the role of Local Government with regards to the learning community concept. It is the people within those networks and partnerships that are the heart of the Hume Global Learning Village as a creative learning community.

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