Learning City Literature Review

The City of Melton:
From a Learning Community
To a Learning City.

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Introduction

The aim of the literature review is to provide the City of Melton with an overview of the national and international literature on learning cities, which builds on the Learning as a Driver for Change project, and also provides a summary of evaluation methods and approaches (Wheeler, Wong et al. 2013). It builds on the research and evidence provided by the first two major evaluation reports *Measuring the Impact of the Community Learning Board as an entity and in building community capacity through lifelong learning* and *Towards the Next Generation Community Learning Plan: Report on the Evaluation of the Shire of Melton Community Learning Plan 2008-2010 (Shire of Melton Community Learning Board 2006; Shire of Melton 2010).* It was through these evaluations that Melton made its first attempts at measuring the strength of its partnerships, the impact of Learning Plan implementation, and identified what activities could be attributed to the Learning Board.

The first Education Board, established in 1998, identified the need to develop "a strategy to establish a local culture where education is seen as critical for both individual and community advancement" (Shire of Melton 2002, p.2). Since then there has been an evolution of strategic thinking about the role of learning in various community learning plans. The Community Learning Plan 2011-2014 explicitly links learning to improvements in social, economic and health outcomes for people throughout the lifecycle.

This is in line with a wealth of international research on the wider benefits of learning. Schuller and Watson (2009) makes explicit that education in all its forms helps people to understand, adapt to and shape change. In addition, a study on the impact of adult learning undertaken in the United Kingdom, found that adult learning, in the form of participating in part-time courses, had a positive effect in the four areas of life, that is, health, employment, social relationships and volunteering (Fujiwara and Cambell 2011). Further, an EU-funded study entitled *The Benefits of Lifelong Learning* (The BELL project) finds that a liberal adult education not only benefits the individual, but also the wider social context (Thöne-Geyer 2014).

The PASCAL International Observatory and others identify that the importance of a coordinated approach to learning and education policy has benefits for a city region. A recent policy briefing summarised these in terms of personal, economic, organisational learning and innovation, building social capital, social cohesion and community development (Pascal International Observatory 2014). They observe that increased learning is associated with greater likelihood of employment, and reduction of poverty and income inequality. This builds on research which suggests that people with more education earn more, are less likely to be unemployed, more likely to be healthy, less likely to commit crimes and more likely to participate in volunteering and other civic activities (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). Furthermore, an OECD report on

Improving Health and Social Change through Education explains that *"education empowers individuals by increasing their knowledge and their cognitive, social and emotional, as well as improving habits, values and attitudes towards healthy life styles and active citizenship"*(OECD 2010, p. 12).

The various Melton Community Learning Plans highlight the importance of investing in different stages of life, with goals aimed at children, youth and adults. In relation to the early years, Dr Sharon Goldfield, Associate Professor Sharon Goldfield, Pediatrician and Research Fellow with the Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital Murdoch Children's Research Institute, argues that investment in the early years of life before the formal school system gives the greatest return. Also, gaps in child development trajectories stay mostly constant after eight years of age – that is, beyond the age of eight, school environments can only play a small role in reducing these gaps. Further, whilst it is never too late to invest efforts to shift developmental trajectories, the cost and effort required increase substantially after the early years period (Goldfield 2012). In addition, international research found that quality preschool education has a bigger influence on a child's literacy and numeracy skills at ages 11 and 14 than their primary school education (Sylva, Melhuish et al. 2010; Melhuish 2011, as cited in Topsfield 2014).

In developing policies for youth and adults in the next learning plan, the City of Melton should also consider future workforce needs. Davies and Fidler et al (2011, pp3-5) of the Institute of the Future, University of Phoenix, suggests there are several drivers of change that are emerging for future work skills. These are:

- "**Extreme longevity:** increasing global lifespans changing the nature of careers and learning.
- **Rise of smart machines and systems:** workplace automation nudging human workers out of rote, repetitive tasks.
- **Computational World**: massive increases in computational power 'make the world a programmable system'.
- **New media ecology:** new communication tools require literacies beyond text
- **Supersized organisations:** social technologies require new forms of production and value creation.
- **Globally connected world:** increased global interconnectivity puts diversity and adaptability at the centre of organizational operations"(pp 3-5).

In light of these changes the Institute suggests 10 work skills that they consider will be critical for success in the workforce:

Sensemaking, social intelligence, novel and adaptive thinking, cross-cultural competency, computational thinking, new media literacy, transdiciplinarity, design mindset, cognitive load management and virtual collaboration (Davies, Fidler et al. 2011).

This increases the importance of lifelong learning and for the role of the Melton Community Learning Board to take a coordinated approach in striving to ensure that young people, adults and older people continue to have access to a range of flexible learning opportunities. Those that embed creative thinking, adaptability, the use of technology and social media, are multi-disciplinary, inclusive, and caters for cultural diversity.

The City of Melton, as an early adopter of a learning community approach, has demonstrated remarkable leadership, but as Osborne and Kearns et al (2013, p.477) point out developing a learning city is a continuous process. There is no 'magic line' over which a city passes in order to become a learning city or region. For Melton this has been a matter of continuous improvement. Early on this local government authority recognised the importance of fostering a community culture that encourages lifelong learning and also one in which provides "world class learning opportunities" to all its citizens (Shire of Melton 2002, p.2). It was the first local government in the State of Victoria, Australia, to have a Community Education Plan (Shire of Melton Community Education Plan 1999-2001). Melton has demonstrated an operational and pragmatic approach over a number of years, and is now in its fifth iteration of a Community Learning Plan. This literature review will contribute to the sixth Community Learning Plan, its first one as a Learning City.

International Learning City Developments

Internationally, the concept of learning communities, cities and towns has been around since the 1970s but gained traction in the 1990s (Longworth 1999; Kearns 2001; Longworth 2006; Kearns 2012). In a recent edited journal on Learning Cities, as part of an International Review of Education, Osborne, Kearns et al discuss the key policies, documents and events that influenced the momentum of learning cities internationally.   They reference the 1972 report to UNESCO – *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and* Tomorrow (Faure, Herrera et al. 1972) which developed the concept of the 'learning society'. In addition, the 1996 report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century – *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors 1996) which is often quoted in Australia to underpin practitioner based activity (Wheeler, Wong et al. 2013; Hume City Council 2014). In addition, international thought leaders in the area have also shared ideas about learning cities and communities which have influenced Australian programs. In fact, ideas and concepts developed by Faris, McNulty and Longworth (Faris 2005; McNulty 2005; Longworth 2006) have been important in validating Australian initiatives.

The promotion and implementation of learning city networks in Europe has not always run smoothly. The term 'learning city' lost its currency in the UK. Jordon et al (2013) contend in a paper on "The rise and fall and rise again of learning cities" that it is the label itself that is the problem, not the strategies (Jordan, Longworth et al. 2013). In Australia many cities are undertaking similar work under different labels, for example, The Healthy City, The Sustainable City, The Smart City, and The Educated City (Saleeba 2013). Practitioners in Australia have reported that while the concept is sometimes difficult to explain, they are getting better at marketing key messages to residents on the ground (Wheeler, Wong et al. 2013).

A briefing statement on learning and the future of cities published by PASCAL International Observatory suggests there are arguably four main tasks for the successful city of the future:

- Stimulate the city economy through improving jobs and skills;
- Provide an appropriate range of public services, including neighbourhood management, available equally to all;
- Provide physical and environmental care, ensuring confidence to existing and potential residents;
- Facilitate a strong voice for residents and influence over local conditions.

The main point made is learning, broadly defined, is a key concept in supporting, sustaining and joining up policies in a coherent framework for city development and can support each one of the four tasks (Pascal International Observatory 2014).

Melton in the Mayor's forward to the Shire of Melton Community Learning Plan 2011 -2014 shows some recognition of this.

> *"Council and the Community Learning Board will embrace these challenges throughout the life of this Community Learning Plan by:*
>
> - *Advocating for new and the upgrading of community infrastructure as shared facilities*
>
> - *Ensuring services are in place and connected to meeting the needs of our increasingly diverse population*
>
> - *Creatively building friendly spaces and identifying friendly places for learning opportunities to take place*
>
> - *Stimulating and supporting the local economy by attracting more business and industry to the municipality, addressing skills shortages and encouraging work place training*
>
> - *Supporting mechanisms that increase the qualifications and skills of residents to enable them to access and create jobs locally*
>
> - *Creating opportunities for dialogue and partnership between business, community, education and training organisations, the services sector and government"* (Shire of Melton Community Learning Plan 2011-2014, p. 3)*.*

The recent rise in learning cities has really been driven by East Asia, in particular Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan (Chang, Hung et al. 2013; Dayong 2013; Han and Makino 2013). At the *Cities Learning Together* conference in Hong Kong in November 2013, Korea was identified as the lighthouse of the learning city developments internationally. In 2013, 118 of 230 local authority entities (cities/counties/districts) were named Lifelong Learning Cities and this is backed up by significant funding (Kwon 2013). Han and Makino (2013) say that the Asian type of learning city contrasts with that of the European approach. They argue the European model is instrumentalist and focused on "human capital promotion, individual competence and life skills development" (p. 441). The Asian learning city has been triggered by a response to "global circumstances and uncertainties" which threatened the traditional way of life and social cohesion. In response the model is characterised by what Han and Makino (2013) term a 'community relations model' which focuses more on "activities to heal and stabilise social issues and foster cultural unity" (p. 466). The City of Melton's approach is a combination of the Asian collaborative model and the European instrumentalist approach. This is evident in the Principles as outlined in The Shire of Melton Community Learning Plan 2011-2014 (p.28) which highlights an integrated 'cradle to grave' approach with a focus on social, economic, human and identity capital to build community capacity.

In view of the increase in learning city activity in East Asia, it is appropriate that the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's (UIL) International Platform of Learning Cities (IPLC) was launched at a conference in Beijing in October 2013 (UNESCO 2014). An outcome was a Declaration on Building Learning Cities in which among other things, "learning communities", "learning cities" and "learning regions" were recognised as pillars of sustainable economic development. The Framework of Key Features of Learning Cities, which is graphically represented by a temple, consisting of:

- A roof illustrating the wider benefits of learning:
    - Individual empowerment and social cohesion;
    - Economic development and cultural prosperity.
- Six pillars featuring different aspects of learning as representing the building blocks of a learning city, and
    - Inclusive learning in the education system;
    - Re-vitalised learning in families and communities;
    - Effective learning for and in the workplace;
    - Extended use of modern learning technologies;
    - Enhanced quality and excellence in learning;
    - A vibrant culture of learning throughout life.
- The foundations which represent the fundamental conditions of building a learning city:

- Strong political will and commitment;
- Governance and participation of all stakeholders;
- Mobilisation and utilization of resources.

The idea of the framework was well received when presented at Australian Learning Community Regional Forums held in May 2014 in Melbourne, Canberra and Townsville. With very little adjustment it also links well to the Australian Learning Community Network Framework (Wheeler and Wong 2013). Blunden and Wheeler used it as an evaluation tool at workshops held with the Melton Community Learning Board, Social Inclusion Lifelong Learning (SILL) Working Group and the Economic Development and Lifelong Learning Working Group (EDLL). In the development of the sixth Community Learning Plan, the City of Melton, has an opportunity to test the Learning City Framework and report the results back to UNESCO on the usefulness of the Framework.

Australian Learning Communities

Learning communities were first developed in Australia in the 1990s in the state of Victoria (Kearns 2001; Kearns, Longworth et al. 2008). A key stimulus was the development of 10 funded learning communities in Victoria in 2000 and a further 10 communities funded as part of a National Learning Communities Project in 2001. The development of many of the funded projects has been patchy, but those that have been most successful are projects which have been run by local government. The City of Melton *(although not funded, joined by choice)* is one of these learning communities, and is among a growing number of geographic areas (towns, shires, cities, regions) that are using learning partnerships approaches as part of economic development, social inclusion, and health and well-being strategies. .(Arden, McLachland et al. 2009; Frankston City Council 2011; Lithgow City Council 2011; Shire of Melton 2011; Gwydir Learning Region 2012; Moonee Valley Council 2012; Townsville City Council 2012; City of Whittlesea 2013; Rigby and Cleaver 2013; Brimbank City Council 2014; Hume City Council 2014). Currently the Australian Learning Communities Network (ALCN) has 45 members.

Galbally and Wong (2008, p. 13) identify that the concept has been particularly useful for local governments in the designated Urban Growth Zones of outer Melbourne. Currently, at least four areas have Community Learning Plans with action plans for planned community development. It has also been a useful as a community development strategy in rural and regional communities (Mitchell 2006; Arden, McLachland et al. 2009).

The learning community approach supported by the ALCN is one based on collaboration. While human capital development, individual competence and life skills are important, the emphasis is on collective learning through partnerships. Stakeholders come together to identify issues and establish priorities for action.

The Australian Learning Community Framework (Wheeler and Wong, 2013) provides a Critical Success Factor Checklist which identifies key elements of a learning community. For example, learning communities can assess their progress against key criteria such as establishing goals and vision, leadership, strategic partnerships, learning and innovation, building community capacity, connecting community and social infrastructure and the provision of an integrated governance structure. The Framework can be used as a planning document and the key diagnostic reflective questions are already being used by learning communities in Australia as planning tools. The next stage, part of the current ACELG *Measuring Impact of Learning Communities* project, is to reorganise the key criteria to link to the UNESCO Learning Cities model and also to provide a strategy for evaluation of learning community developments. The City of Melton, as a mature learning community, is playing an important role in designing this strategy.

Evaluating Learning Cities – International Experience

To use the words of Osborne and Kearns (2013, p. 419), when summarising the findings of a quality framework developed for learning cities by Preisinger-Kleine (2013), "a very important lesson learned is that without evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms, local authorities do not have the means to examine their strengths and weaknesses".

The measurement of learning cities/regions and communities is recognised internationally as vitally important to the implementation and development of a learning city, yet at the same time it is challenging (Dayong 2013; Osborne, Kearns et al. 2013; Preisinger-Kleine 2013; UNESCO 2014). There is no 'one size fits all'. The way that Hume City evaluates and benchmarks its learning city activities is different from the City of Melton. However, there will be similarities as both must adhere to frameworks and committee structures that align with Section 86 of the Local Government Act, 1989 (State Governement of Victoria 1989).

The UNESCO Learning Cities Framework also considers evaluation. It provides a list of the key features and measurements as a guide. However, at this stage it is no more than a framework and has not yet been implemented. The Beijing conference report makes reference to the need to collect 'big data' sets and highlights models already in existence, such as the Canadian Learning Index (CLI), specifically designed for lifelong learning or the Siemens Green Cities Index.

> "..as 'big data' takes centre stage in policy making, data collection and analysis can help cities provide quality learning for the well-being and happiness of citizens" (p.13).

Cappon and Laughlin (2013) outline an example of how big data sets have been used to measure the impact of learning communities across Canada using a Composition Learning Index (CLI). The CLI was developed by the Canadian Council on Learning and builds on a conceptual

framework based on *Learning: The Treasure within* (Delors et al 1966). This organized learning into four pillars: Learning to Know, Learning to do, Learning to Live together, and Learning to Be. The model uses seven (five social and two economic) outcomes – adult literacy, early childhood development, population health, environmental responsibility, voter participation, income and unemployment. As Osborne et al note the "2010 CLI, comprises 17 indicators and 26 specific measures generate numeric scores for more than 4,500 communities across Canada." (Osborne, Kearns et al citing CCL 2010). Cappon and Lauglin (2013) contend that the true value of the CLI is the direct relationship between learning at one end of the model, connected to social and economic well-being at the other end. They see that this approach offers a return on investment for communities and the CLI is a powerful resource for community development. They conclude that there is value in having a broad based index focused on educational values and outcomes. They caution that it takes a long time, and it must be a systematic collection of information.

Several initiatives in Europe and Asia have developed tools, techniques and frameworks for measuring learning cities and regions (Longworth 2006; Dayong 2013; Osborne, Kearns et al. 2013). Longworth (2006) notes the European Commission's TELS (Towards a European Learning Society) project was one of the first. It ran from 1998 until 2001 and had a main objective encouraging cities, towns and regions to take the then new concept on board and developed an extensive audit tool (the Learning Cities Audit Tool) identifying ten major municipal learning domains and 40 sub-domains were cities, towns and regions might need to take action. A successor to the TELS project was the European Commission R3L programme, one the programmes being an INDICATOR program which produced a series of tools called "Stakeholder Audits". These tools were examples of sophisticated meta-tools for use across learning cities and regions and were relatively expensive to implement (Longworth 2006). Osborne, Kearns et al (2013) also report on the other learning indexes, namely, the European Lifelong Learning Index (ELLI) and the *German Learning Atlas: Making lifelong learning tangible on a regional level* (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012 as cited in Osborne, Kearns et al, 2013). Finally, Preisinger-Kleine, R. (2013) proposes an evaluation framework that builds on the work of Cara and Ranson (1998) in the United Kingdom and the R3L + project, which ran in eight European regions/cities from 2007-2013. This framework is based on a quality assurance and systems approach, and Preisinger-Kleine says it will be useful for learning cities and regions to determine strengths and weaknesses. It proposes four quality areas:

- Partnership,
- Participation,
- Progress and sustainability,
- and learning culture.

For each of these, the framework sets out quality criteria and indicators, which can be used to determine and improve quality in these areas. Further, a quality cycle linking to a quality assurance process, describes the practical use of the measuring instruments.

The audit systems described above are very complex and expensive to design and implement. Yarnit (2013) provides a word of caution to anyone designing evaluation frameworks for learning city and region projects. He suggests that the Canadian and European funded projects found that designing the evaluation systems was one thing, but getting stakeholders to use them was quite another. He contends that learning city networks have been weak at creating and maintaining the use of standards. He believes this is for two main reasons:

1. "Practitioners are loath to take out time and resources from practical matters to create or utilize evaluation schemes.
2. Existing data sources that can be used to assess the progress made by learning cities have usually been designed for other purposes and are rarely ideal, whilst creating new datasets is an expensive business" (p. 51).

He strongly recommends, based on the lessons learned that, while learning city indicators are essential to a better understanding of the impact of learning on urban development, they should be designed and implemented by practitioners (Yarnit 2013, p.52).

Osborne emphasized the importance of research and collaboration to promote learning cities and made practical suggestions to UNESCO:

1) "Prepare quantitative datasets of key features of learning cities and utilize longitudinal analysis on the datasets.
2) Use comparative analysis to measure performance
3) Benchmark current infrastructure development and practice
4) Highlight cases of good practice
5) Collaborate by sharing knowledge among cities
6) Review progress at regular intervals" (UNESCO, 2014 p.13).

These suggestions combined with Yarnit's words of caution . emphasize the importance of coming up with an evaluation strategy that supports local circumstances, especially resourcing.

Evaluating Learning Cities in Australia

The only evaluation framework developed in Australia for use by the a Victorian State Government funded Victorian Learning Towns project in early 2005 was the Victorian Performance Measurement Framework (VPMF), commonly known as the Measuring Impact (MI) Tool. The Framework adapted a program logic method to learning community programs. It used a tiered approach, and required stakeholders to agree on what was to be evaluated at each of the following tier levels:

- Level One: Function of Learning Communities,
- Level Two: Learning Delivery and Outcomes,

- Level Three: Lifelong Learning,
- Level Four: Community Capacity.

At level of the functions of learning communities, stakeholders might measure the strength of partnerships or undertake a learning needs analysis. An example of a measurement at level two the number and quality of learning programs. At level three practitioners were required to identify how their particular programs contributed to lifelong learning in a community. Finally, at level four, how program/s contributed to economic development via jobs created, leadership developed, or contribution to innovation, or the cultural life of the community.

The collection of data involved a mix method approach including personal interviews with key community informants, focus group interviews of key stakeholders and partnership mapping/collaboration charts. It required the systematic collection of data through surveys, use of Likert scales, and consistent interview questions so changes could be observed over time.

Innovative methods included the use of selective small group conversations which involved detailed discussions of three or four informed people to explore the functions and outputs of learning communities in great depth. Also members developed graphical collaboration charts to map changes in relationships due to learning community activities with quantitative scores (Golding, 2004 as cited in Cavaye et al, 2013). In addition, "detailed interviews and small group discussions were needed to isolate the effects of learning community activities from other influences and to explore the cause and effect of relationships between activities and outcomes"(Cavaye et al, 2013, p. 7).

A desktop analysis of The City of Melton's evaluation processes, as part of the ACELG project, demonstrates that evaluation methodology has evolved over time to become more targeted and outcomes orientated. The first comprehensive attempt to evaluate was *Measuring the Impact of the Melton Community Learning Board* report (Shire of Melton Community Learning Board 2006). This was based on the MI Tool, and provided both qualitative and quantitative measures, and analysis for each of the four levels of learning community activity. The next major evaluation was in 2010 with *Towards the Next Generation Community Learning Plan* (Shire of Melton, 2010). It used a mixed methods approach, gathering evidence from a variety of sources including literature, surveys, extensive consultation, and also sourced relevant demographic and other data. This information was linked to a number of recommendations to be implemented under relevant goals and objectives.

The main point of comparison between the 2006 and 2010 evaluation reports is the quantification of the level of engagement of organisations and networks to the Community Learning Board Relationship Strength. A partnership is given an arithmetic weighting based on

the strength of collaboration, from 0 meaning no collaboration through to 3 being active collaboration being involved for 12 or more months. The results show that there was a significant increase in strength of partnerships over time. It is stated that in in 2006 the relationship strength was 45 while in 2010 it was 64. There is recognition of the need to build on this work. Based on the work of Cappon and Laughlin (2013) and the an analytical quality framework which builds on the European Commission R3L+ programme (Preisinger-Kleine (2013), the City of Melton has embarked on enhancing the partnerships analysis process to derive a more comprehensive measure of the impact of its Learning Community strategy (known as the Melton Partnership Outcomes Tool). It is working on ways to synthesise the measure of partnership strength with outcome strength and in conjunction with the ACELG project, is developing a tool that is based on best practice, fit for purpose, practical and measures consistently over time (Wong, S, Wong, I, & Blunden, P, Wheeler, L, 2014)

A desktop analysis of evaluation documents and various community learning plans also shows there is room for improvement. While the amount of research undertaken is clearly impressive, Blunden (2014) identified that there is an immense amount of data now accumulated and a lack of time and resources to undertake more detailed analysis. Work is also being completed to tighten the language around indicators, and to ensure baseline data and targets are established in setting goals and success measures. This will provide trend data for improved comparison over time.

In Australia there is also growing interest in measuring the collective impact of partnerships to address a range of social issues, including education (Kania and Kramer 2011). This system comes from the US where long term commitments are made by strategic partners from different sectors to set a common agenda to solve a specific social problem Highlighted examples demonstrate a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities and ongoing communication. Cayave, Wheeler et al (2013) note that learning communities largely include elements of collective impact as described by Kania and Kramer (2011, 2013). They involve Kania and Kramer's common agenda, backbone support organizations, and emerging shared measurement systems. However, in Australia, they less reflect mutually reinforcing activities and continuous communication. While activities are coordinated and information is shared between participants, in many situations, this reflects collaboration more than truly collective impact (p.2). However, it is worth monitoring because recently Pro Bono Australia News announced that Kramer was working with the Woodside Development Fund and cross sector stakeholders to apply the model to the early childhood space in Western Australia (Morgan 2014). It may be the next step for Learning Community Partnerships to investigate the shared measurement system with a view to strengthening evaluation activities.

Governance of Learning Cities

> "Effective governance ensures that the decision making process is transparent, follows ethical practices and complies with relevant regulations.
>
> Good governance also requires that clear plans and actions are in place and that there is active monitoring and reporting."(Shire of Melton 2008, p.1).

Wheeler and Wong et al (2013, p.22) discuss at length the importance of strong governance mechanisms for learning community partnerships. They summarized the examples and the literature on community governance, into the following principles:

- Responsiveness to local circumstances by civic authorities,
- Early delivery of social infrastructure,
- Harnessing local community influence to achieve common goals,
- Alignment of community issues with government goals,
- Strong strategic and operational community plans,
- Clear accountability structures,
- Advocacy of local issues,
- Authorising body has the final say on objectives and evaluation,
- Evaluation processes,
- Strong and close support from Local Government,
- Broad diversity of representation possessing forms of authority and decision-making,
- Deeply collaborative networks of public, private, not-for-profit and non-government agencies and local communities,
- Practical, flexible and creative governance structures,
- Cross-sectorial community partnerships for economic and social development.

In relation to learning cities UNESCO (2014, p.33) identify that governance and participation of stakeholders is a fundamental condition for building a learning city. This is about establishing what they term "inter-sectorial co-ordination mechanisms" from government, non-government and private sector organisations. In addition, stakeholders are encouraged to co-ordinate plans in order to develop "better and more accessible learning opportunities within their areas of responsibilities".

The Australian Learning Community Framework (Wheeler and Wong 2013, p.7) provides the following indicators as a way that a learning partnership can assess its Governance Structure:

- Local government adopts a collaborative approach to allow local communities to make decisions about their place and play a direct role in delivering services and undertaking projects to achieve desired outcomes.
- A community governance structure has been developed that will deliver increased collaboration to maximise participation in employment, education or public life.

- Responsibilities are clearly allocated to each partner.
- There is a shared understanding of the objectives and management of the partnership.
- All projects and programs are delivered legally and ethically.
- A way forward is established that monitors progress systematically.

An examination of various Melton Community Learning Plans and evaluation reports demonstrates that Governance is a strength area. In particular, the structure of the Community Learning Board has evolved so that is now a statutory body which is linked to the Council's planning processes. This streamlines accountability and the monitoring process.

Conclusion:

There are many compelling reasons why the City of Melton invests in learning as a driver for change. The latest Community Learning Plan for Melton links learning to improvements in social, economic and health outcomes for people throughout the lifecycle. International research demonstrates that the wider benefits of learning for the individual are in four main areas – health, employment, social relationships and volunteering. While investment in the early years gives the greatest return in the long term. In addition, having a coordinated approach to learning and education has many benefits for a city region. First, in stimulating the city economy through jobs and skills, and ensuring that future drivers for change and work skills are accounted for. Second, it strives to ensure that all age groups (early years, young people, adults and older people) have access to a range of flexible learning opportunities to cater for their needs. Third, such a strategy enables the effective utilisation of physical and environmental infrastructure. Finally, it facilitates a strong voice for residence and influence over local conditions.

Influenced by an increase in learning city activity in East Asia, the, the strategies and features of the learning city concept are on the rise. As well, the UNESCO Framework of Key Features of Learning Cities enables a city region to compare its activity in this area. Further, the ACELG Australian Learning Community Framework provides tools which can be linked to the UNESCO Framework and adapted for local conditions.

It is clear that evaluation and quality assurance of learning city activity is very important. It enables a local government authority to examine their strengths and weaknesses. The City of Melton, through five Community Learning Plans and two evaluation reports has taken evaluation seriously. The strong Governance model provided by the Melton Community Learning Board, demonstrates it values an action research approach. It also understands and is working on streamlining the data collected to ensure targets and outcomes can be measured over time.

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