

It May Take a Village to Educate a Community

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Abstract

Hume City Council recognises that learning and education are key determinants to economic and social well being for individuals, families, businesses and communities. The council also recognises we alone cannot address the myriad of issues and needs related to creating a learning community.

In 2003, Hume City Council facilitated the development of the Hume Global Learning Village — a 300+ collaboration of local formal, non-formal and informal learning providers with the objective of engaging the community in planning for real and sustainable change.

Village members collaborated to produce a five-year plan — the Learning Together Strategy. Fifty-six linked projects, programs and strategies have been developed by the village, enabling all village members to embrace a leading role in developing Hume's learning culture.

Key partnerships within the corporate and philanthropic sectors supports and enhances the work of the village and has enabled the development of Hume's flagship learning centres — the Hume Global Learning Centre and Visy Cares Learning Centre at Meadow Heights.

Hume City Council, as the advocate for the community, has been able to bring together organisations, individuals, institutions and businesses to achieve a vision for the community. It is a unique connection of shared responsibility, linked activity, cross-sectional networking and issues-based collaboration, melding often competing interests. It brings together social and economic imperatives, emphasising the relationship between them, for a successful and sustainable community.

Keywords

Learning community, life long learning, local government, Hume Global Learning Village

Introduction

Hume City Council is an outer metropolitan fringe council, north of Melbourne, Victoria. 155,000 people call Hume home, with approximately 100,000 living in the highly urbanised southern part of the municipality. Hume has a significant growth corridor, with both residential and commercial development as well as rural and semi-rural areas.

Southern Hume includes the suburb of Broadmeadows, established in the 1950s to support the growing manufacturing industries at the time. There is a high representation of public housing and significant issues of social and economic disadvantage. Thirty-five per cent of the Hume community speaks a language other than English at home, and Hume is home to over 100 different nationalities. Literacy levels in southern Hume are well below national benchmarks and only 32 per cent of residents completed Year 12. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) small labour market surveys in December 2004 showed the unemployment rate in Broadmeadows at 11.7 per cent, well above the Melbourne average of 5.4 per cent.

Hume's population is also young — against the trend of many other urban areas in Australia. 33.8 per cent of Hume's population is under the age of 18 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000 Census). Youth issues, such as disengagement from formal education, are very much on the agenda at Hume. So too, is the lack of Internet and information technology uptake in southern Hume. ABS census statistics from 2000 shows that 19 per cent of Broadmeadows residents use the Internet, which is less than half the Melbourne average.

The economic scene in Hume is strong and growing. Manufacturing, logistics and transport are examples of the industry clusters forming around the main transport corridors within Hume. There are an estimated 57,000 jobs in Hume, but only one-third of these jobs are taken by local residents. Skill deficiencies in the local potential workforce have been identified as a key concern.

Hume, and in particular southern Hume, has a resilient, diverse community, but one that does not enjoy sustainable levels of social and economic advantage. Many resources — government, philanthropic, community-based and private — are provided to develop learning and other interventions in the Hume community. Until 2003, these resources were being deployed in 'silo' structures, with collaboration and shared resourcing being the result of personal connections. Policies, programs, objectives and goals were developed independently of each other.

Hume enjoys tremendous goodwill from the professionals who choose to work there, from the businesses resident in the area, from philanthropic and community-based organisations seeking to contribute to change and from its educational institutions. Harnessing this goodwill, enabling it to achieve more through collaboration and providing a shared, interconnected framework, has been the goal of Hume City Council and the work of the Hume Global Learning Village.

Hume's Social Justice Charter

Hume City Council recognised the need to focus attention on ensuring social inclusion and economic prosperity through its Social Justice Charter. Produced for the first time in 2000 and revised in 2004, the Social Justice Charter establishes council's commitment to supporting participation from all sectors of the community. Underpinning the Social Justice Charter is the principle of a learning community. Learning is identified as the key driver of the changes needed.

The charter identifies youth, children, women, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people with addictive disorders, people with disabilities, socially isolated people, Indigenous people and unemployed people as needing particular support to become lifelong learners.

Hume Global Learning Village

The Hume Global Learning Village is a collaboration of over 300 people and organisations with an interest in learning in Hume. Members include 53 schools, nine neighbourhood (community) houses, institutes of Technical and Further Education (TAFE), universities, community and special interest groups, sporting clubs, private tutors and trainers and businesses.

The Hume Global Learning Village is a multi-sector, multi-stakeholder partnership, characterised by the involvement of people and organisations from formal and informal learning activities. Learning is defined in its broadest sense — from formal qualification-based educational programs through to recreational and rehabilitative activities.

The Village is a network of these people and organisations brought together by Hume City Council, with a common vision for Hume — “a learning community where people embrace learning as a way of life, for all their life, thereby creating a community that values learning as the key to strengthening individual and community well being.” (Hume Global Learning Village 2004, p. 1)

Hume Global Learning Village members, with resources provided by Hume City Council, developed this vision and a Statement of Understanding in June 2003. Following from this, the structure of the Village was developed and subsequently in September 2004, a five-year plan launched. Entitled the Learning Together Strategy, there are 56 projects, programs and strategies designed to develop lifelong learners in Hume.

Interdisciplinary collaboration

One of the key strengths of the Hume Global Learning Village is its interdisciplinary, multi-sector membership. The Village harnesses the effort and enthusiasm of school principals,

community workers, business executives, community representatives, academics, researchers and many others. It is unlikely that these people would normally meet and partner in projects, but the Village provides them with the opportunity and encouragement to establish relationships, joint projects and shared resourcing. Examples such as Victoria University and the Sunbury Community Health Centre working on an IT project, and the Dallas Neighbourhood House and unemployment support group WorkForce Plus, are partnering with Hume City Council in a neighbourhood renewal program.

Across council, there are a number of programs, services and strategies that relate to learning. The Hume Global Learning Village includes them in the overall framework, enabling the reduction in 'silos' within the organisation itself. Social development staff, economic development staff, pre-school teachers, youth workers, librarians and maternal and child health staff are linked into the Hume Global Learning Village, improving pathways for the community, enabling systemic barriers to be addressed and for the learning message to be further facilitated.

Business community partnerships

Hume City Council and the Hume Global Learning Village enjoy the proactive support of private sector partners. Ford Motor Company and *The Age* newspaper are active participants in the Village. Initially, their contributions were financial, with them supporting the development of the Hume Global Learning Centre — the iconic 'hub' of the Hume Global Learning Village's activities. Both companies share the vision and values of the Hume Global Learning Village and Hume City Council in relation to the community, the opportunities opened by learning and the importance of literacy and education. Engaging with these organisations offers the community access to a range of programs and support. This includes learning programs developed by the Education Unit of *The Age*, access to *The Age*'s printed and electronic resources, and the expertise and mentoring skills of staff from Ford.

Ford has supported a workplace skills program for Indigenous long-term unemployed people, providing mentors from within their staff. Ford now advocates to other local businesses on the benefits of good corporate citizenship, and the benefits of participating in the Hume Global Learning Village. They also support an annual program where a free computer and one year of free Internet access is awarded to a Year 4 child in each of the 44 local primary schools. Awarded for demonstrating a 'love of learning' these children come from families not likely to be able to afford a computer in the home.

The Age Education Unit develops programs to educate teachers about using current media in the classroom and senior secondary students about current affairs and the use of the media in their studies. These programs are provided to the Hume Global Learning Village, via the Hume Global Learning Centre. *The Age* has also brokered a partnership between the Village

and the Australian Centre for Youth Literature, enabling Hume's young people to access workshops by authors and playwrights, further encouraging literacy and a love of reading.

Hume City Council, on behalf to the Hume Global Learning Village, and *The Age* won the Victorian Award for Business Community partnerships (Large Corporations category) in 2003.

Competing interests

While Hume enjoys the enthusiastic support of the many people, there are nonetheless competing interests within the Village. The fact that the Hume Global Learning Village is facilitated by Hume City Council encourages people to come together under a common vision, notwithstanding their normal competitive environment. A focus on issues-based activities to benefit all Village members and their operations, enables collaboration within the Village.

Role of Hume City Council

Hume City Council's role as facilitator means that the administration of the Village is the responsibility of council staff. Staff of the Learning Community Department call meetings, keep minutes, arrange professional development opportunities for members, provide promotional opportunities for Village members' programs, and develop networking events. Hume staff act as a clearing house for information on programs, projects, funding opportunities and professional development opportunities for Village members. The council staff act as the 'glue' that holds the Hume Global Learning Village together, enabling members to provide their expertise and time in such a way as to maximise their input and value, without the burden of organisational administration.

Hume City Council is also a key advocate for the local community. Council has first hand experience and information about the local community, local businesses, their needs and aspirations. This brings legitimacy to the role of facilitator and coordinator of the Village. Council understands however, that such a wide-ranging intervention cannot be successful if it is 'managed' by the council. Rather, council is the 'enabling' body, with the Village establishing a vision, structure, representation and strategy.

Structure of the Hume Global Learning Village

Membership of the Hume Global Learning Village is free of charge to any person or organisation with an interest in Hume. Members are not required to have a physical presence in the municipality, but must have programs, projects or interests in the area. This enables a number of non-resident universities and TAFE institutes to play an active part in the Village. The members of the Village are called the Hume Global Learning Village Forum.

Overseeing the operations of the Village is a committee of 15 people, representing the membership. They are nominated from within the membership and is the decision-making body for the Village. They ensure that the implementation of the Learning Together strategy is on track and consider opportunities for the Village. They are 'hands on' in the local community and provide practical advice to the council and Village Forum.

Providing high level advice and support to both Village members and Hume City Council is the Hume Global Learning Village Advisory Board. This 25-member group represents senior people in academia, government, research, business, the community sector and marketing. Each is able to advocate on behalf of the Village in senior circles and provide access to information to support the goals of the Village.

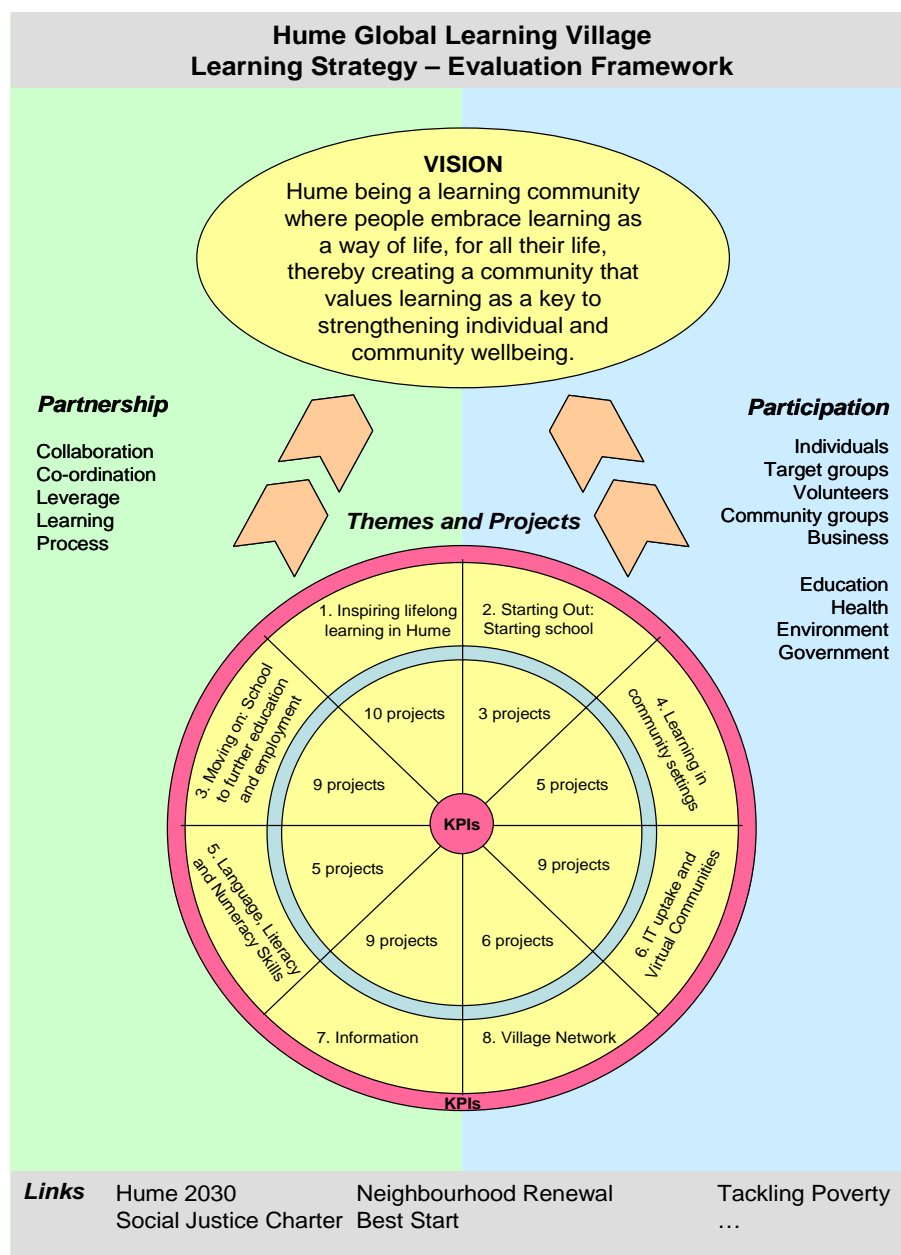


Figure 1. Evaluation framework for the Hume Global Learning Village

Evaluation framework

Figure 1 shows a diagram of the evaluation framework developed for the Hume Global Learning Village and specifically the Learning Together strategy. It enables measurement of broad overall objectives and of each project or program. Evaluation of the Learning Together Strategy relates specifically to community building or social capital measures. This framework was developed by Hume Global Learning Village members, with the assistance of Ian Phillips and under the leadership of Leone Wheeler of RMIT University. Mr Phillips has been involved in the Community Building Resource Service funded by the Victorian Government's Department of Victorian Communities and he has linked his work to that of the Hume Global Learning Village.

The evaluation framework links to other council, state government and community plans, such as the council's Social Justice Charter, the state government's Neighbourhood Renewal plan and the community's Hume City 2030 plan.

Learning Together Strategy

The Learning Together strategy was developed by Hume Global Learning Village members and released in September 2004. It is a five-year plan, covering the activities of Village members. It documents projects and provides for members to take leadership or be involved in programs.

The Strategy has eight themes, under which projects are developed:

1. Inspiring lifelong learning in Hume
2. Starting out: Starting School
3. Moving on: School to further education and employment
4. Learning in community settings
5. Language, literacy and numeracy skills
6. Information technology uptake and virtual communities
7. Information
8. Village network.

The full Learning Together strategy is available at <<http://www.hume.vic.gov.au>>.

Inspiring lifelong learning in Hume

Fundamental to the Learning Community outcome is the need to change perceptions, beliefs and behaviours in our community. Widely held views of learning as being a formal school-based activity suited only to 'bookworms' must be changed. Key messages such as 'everyone is a learner', 'we all learn in different ways', learning is fun', 'learning is vital for you today and in the future' are to be encouraged.

Celebrating teachers as well as learners is important. Teaching in Hume can pose challenges. Many students in Hume are from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds and some from families suffering second and third generation unemployment. The Village promotes the value of teachers through a scholarship program, celebrating teaching excellence and enabling the growth of knowledge and skill in our teachers. Hume City Council supports this program financially.

Mentoring is an essential element of the Learning Together Strategy for Hume, with a number of projects being undertaken to increase the participation of young people and mentors. A large and ambitious project entitled Inspiring Stories has been developed, harnessing the stories and support of local people who have a success story to share. These stories will be the basis of many other activities — from career events, to motivational programs, publicity campaigns and special events. Leadership programs also form part of this theme.

Starting out — starting school

Hume has a significantly low level of participation in pre-school activity. Teachers advise this can put children 18 months behind their school friends and this gap is rarely made up over the length of their schooling. Addressing this through parent education, better transport, more accessibility to programs for people of non-English speaking backgrounds and making preschool activities culturally appropriate are initiatives established in the Learning Together Strategy.

So too, the Strategy provides for aggressive action on systemic barriers to collaboration between preschool activities, primary schools and secondary schools — enabling transitions to be facilitated and outcomes to be maximised. All educators — including those in secondary schools and tertiary institutions now participate in addressing the issue of pre-school attendance.

The Victorian Department of Education and Training is currently reviewing the model of education in the southern Hume region. The Hume Global Learning Village plays an active part in this review, with the objective of creating true community ownership of the education of its young people.

Moving on: school to further education and employment

Year 12 school completion rates are generally low in Hume. Participation in universities is low relative to other municipalities and unemployment is relatively high. Local people do not win the many locally available jobs.

This theme addresses these issues, with a focus on keeping young people engaged in their schooling, supporting them with information for their future beyond school and breaking down

barriers (perceived or real) to participation in tertiary study. There are nine projects in this theme and many Hume Global Learning Village members are involved in a number of projects. These members decided to come together and form one overriding project group known as the Theme Three group. They meet and collaboratively plan for and implement projects, linking the projects and maximising outcomes.

Learning in community settings

Informal learning is essential to the development of a Learning Community. Programs at the grassroots can often be the place that learners start their lifelong learning journey and the community infrastructure that supports this is vital in the Hume Global Learning Village.

This theme looks to leverage learning outcomes from existing organisations and sites (such as special interest groups and community meeting places). To create a Learning Community, the learning message and access to learning opportunities must be pervasive. Tapping into existing community infrastructure maximises the connection between learning and people's lives.

Language, literacy and numeracy skills

As described earlier, Hume enjoys a richness provided by a multicultural community, but this also brings the issues faced when English is a second language. Combined with this, the high proportion of school non-completion and other factors means that Hume experiences low levels of literacy in some families.

The Hume Global Learning Village members have developed programs, plans and projects to improve literacy. These range from access to English language classes for migrants, to English classes for the toddlers of parents in English classes and a literacy program for young people who have recently entered the court system.

Key success factors — what are the lessons for other learning communities?

When reviewing the Hume Global Learning Village, the following can be highlighted as key success factors:

- Community engagement across sectors and interests ensures that the learning agenda is woven into the fabric of the many communities making up Hume
- The multidisciplinary nature of the Village enables a broad base of skills, contacts and resources to be brought to the learning agenda
- Having a local government authority as the facilitating body for the Village, without direct links to any formal education program or organisation enables parties to come together without fear of vested interests
- Local government has the credibility of speaking for and working with the community in an unbiased way. For example, the highly competitive universities in Melbourne have come

together under the banner of the Village to address issues of under representation of our young people in the sector. So too, the very competitive job network providers in the area have come together to discuss issues of systemic blocks to workforce participation.

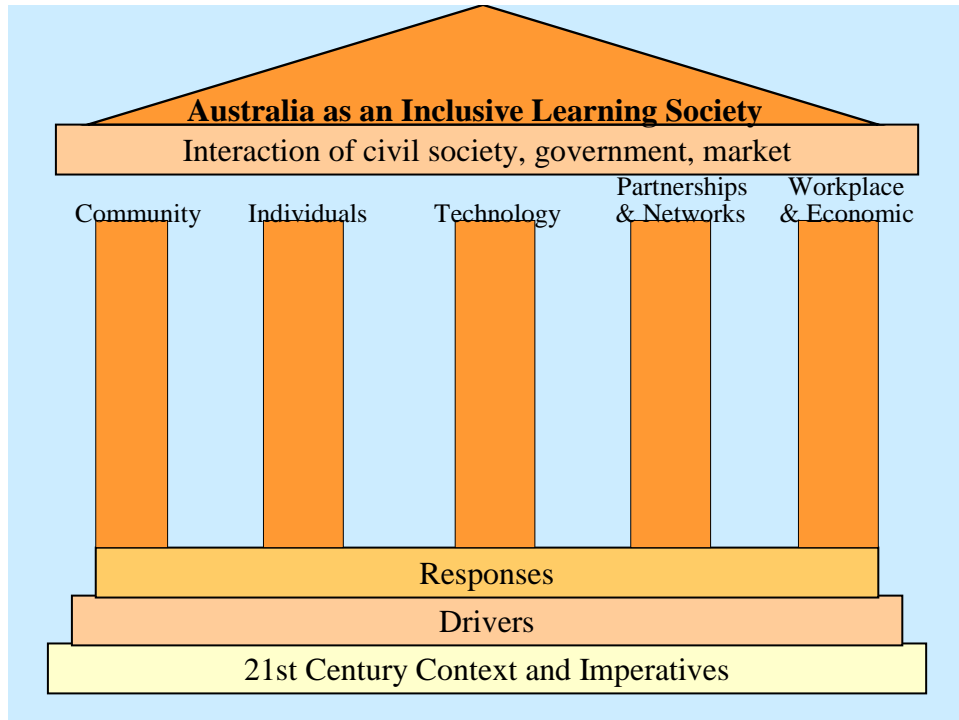
- Self-management and self determination is essential for the Village members to feel that the collaboration is core to their activities and has a priority in their working day
- Having Hume City Council fund and resource the 'executive officer' role of the Village, enables members to be more able to contribute their expertise and time to collaborative projects. They are encouraged to participate, knowing that they will not be asked to undertake the administrative tasks often asked of people on groups or committees.
- The building of the Hume Global Learning Centre, as the focal point to the Village, has signalled to the community that change is occurring for their community and that their lives are changing. It also highlights to them that they are worthy of having high class, innovative community facilities. It has prepared the way for learning messages to be received by the community.
- The benefit of a very senior and well connected Hume Global Learning Village Advisory Board is in the support that they provide to the activities of individual members and programs as well as the Village as a whole. The chairman of the Village Advisory Board is a former premier of Victoria, with a known interest in education and social justice. His involvement and advocacy (along with the other members) adds credibility to the Village and facilitates access to funding sources, research and decision-makers.
- The collaborative development of the Learning Together Strategy, through a series of 'strategic conversations' has ensured that members are connected to the plan, they have a role in implementing the plan and see their day-to-day activities as part of the plan
- Village members have been able to make connections through the Village (not possible had they not met through the Village activities). Unusual partnerships have developed across sectors, between public and private organisations, and involving formal and informal learning opportunities.

A model for a learning community — the Hume Global Learning Village in light of current research

There are a number of models developed to guide the establishment of a Learning Community. One of the key Australian researchers into lifelong learning is Mr Peter Kearns. Peter is a member of the Hume Global Learning Village Advisory Board and provides the benefit of national and international knowledge to the Village and its development.

His recently developed Learning Society model shows the interaction between community participation, government and market forces. His model supports the activities of the Hume Global Learning Village; the themes of the Learning Together strategy match the 'columns' in his Greek temple model. The Learning Together strategy reflects the work being done by groups and organisations working with all age groups and cultural backgrounds, literacy

levels, interests and needs. The interaction of these activities is defined by the Learning Together Strategy, linking activity to collaboratively achieve a Learning Community.



Source: Kearns P 2005, *Achieving Australia as an inclusive learning society a report for Adult Learning Australia*, Canberra.

It is early days for the Hume Global Learning Village, but indications after two years of collaboration are that the Village is making a difference in the way that activities associated with learning opportunities, employment, recreation and education are provided, promoted and accessed.

Further information about the Hume Global Learning Village is available on the Hume City Council website <<http://www.hume.vic.gov.au>>.