

Galvanising Commitment to Lifelong Learning through Strategic Partnerships

Paper presented on 30 October 2000

at the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training National Conference, Mobilising Resources for Lifelong Learning.

Professor Denis Ralph

Executive Director

Centre for Lifelong Learning and Development

Adelaide, Australia

Email: denis.ralph@flinders.edu.au

Before starting this paper I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional land of the Wurundjeri people. I pledge my commitment to work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia to achieve reconciliation so that we stand proud as a united Australia that respects this land of ours, values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all.

Lifelong learning is a key ingredient for success in the knowledge economy of this new century. The imperative for Lifelong Learning is now even more important in the new century than it was in the last decades of the 20th century because of the burgeoning developments in:

- information and communication technology
- the emergence of the knowledge economy and the knowledge worker explosion by 2010 and
- changes in demography and the ageing profile of many societies.

However, it is not just enough for enthusiastic educators or community members to talk about lifelong learning, learning communities or learning networks. These concepts need to be embedded in policy, programs and outcome statements of government. This requires commitment to the lifelong learning concept and translation of rhetoric into reality is essential. But governments can't do it alone either. There is a vital need for a wide range of strategic partnerships / alliances to make it happen.

We will not be successful in mobilising resources for lifelong learning unless we are successful in galvanising commitment to lifelong learning.

This paper outlines the strategies used in South Australia to galvanise commitment to lifelong learning through strategic partnerships. The paper has an underlying premise that successful learning communities based on lifelong learning principles will develop and thrive in a context where:

- there is a firm foundation of political leadership and commitment
- where the building materials are the systems/communities/industries/individuals
- and also where there is a structural support which is provided through strategic partnerships and alliances.

This paper begins with a description of South Australia as a State of Learning. It then outlines the basic concepts of lifelong learning and learning communities as used in South Australia. The strategies for establishing and maintaining commitment to lifelong learning through networks, alliances and strategic partnerships in South Australia follow. It then identifies the next stage needed to strengthen this commitment and finally the paper identifies some future directions for the South Australia as a State of Learning.

A Vision: South Australia as a State of Learning

In South Australia we believe that one of the key elements which must be satisfied for the achieved status of the State of Learning is that there is clear evidence of high levels of participation by people of all ages from all parts of the state in active learning, because we believe that our people are our most precious asset and resource. There will be exemplary organisations where learning is seen as an investment for a highly skilled and flexible workforce to deliver the triple bottom line. There will be a thriving learning community across the state with very strong networks of cooperating learning communities, towns and cities. There will be high levels of regional connectivity but with national perspectives and connectivity. These communities will also have global perspectives and meaningful international and global connectivity.

At this stage it is useful to provide a working definition of a State of Learning. A definition of a State of Learning used in South Australia is one adapted from Longworth, 1999

A State of Learning is a State -

‘which goes beyond its statutory duty to provide education and training for those who require it and instead creates a vibrant, participative, culturally aware and economically buoyant human environment through the provision, justification and active promotion of learning opportunities to enhance the potential of all its citizens.’

When this definition is translated into a vision for South Australia as a State of Learning South Australia will be a place where individuals are supported and encouraged to achieve personal growth, develop positive self-esteem, a real love for learning and employability. It will be a place that promotes learning as a cradle-to-grave process, facilitates personal discovery and inquiry and assists individuals to fulfil their life’s purpose. The quality learning infrastructure will ensure strong foundations for lifelong learning and enable the achievement of quality standards. There will be strong evidence of family and intergenerational learning.

Our thriving learning communities will possess a collective capacity to continuously adapt, transform, renew, create and innovate. They will build social cohesion and strengthen civic participation in decision-making processes. They will be places where caring citizenship, services, equality of access and opportunity, quality of life, and cultural and artistic diversity, are both encouraged and valued. There will be strong connectivity linking towns and regions. South Australian communities in this digital age will be at the leading edge in the use of information and communication technologies to strengthen and expand cyber learning along with our global and virtual community linkages.

They will also be communities where flexible pathways exist between educational institutions and where learning achievements are celebrated - often. In order to create economic prosperity and resilience, business enterprises, institutions and non- government organisations in South Australia will commit themselves to building and sustaining cultures of innovation, curiosity, experimentation, risk taking and continuous improvement.

As exemplary learning organisations they will consider learning to be an investment and build strategic partnerships to achieve organisational goals. They will act upon the belief that the linchpins of their competitive success and increased productivity, are the intellectual capital of their workforce and the processes of teamwork, devolved decision making and systems thinking.

They will also design and implement organisational policies that reflect a genuine respect for individual workers, the broader society and the natural environment.

This is our shared vision. This is our goal for South Australia to become a State of Learning.

However, a state cannot achieve the status of State of Learning:

- if it does not address barriers to learning
- if it does not undertake extensive and focussed research and development
- if it is not learner driven rather than institutional driven
- if it is not socially just and socially inclusive

Having examined this rich set of attributes for a State of Learning we know that a major objective in achieving this State of Learning is to make lifelong learning a reality for all in South Australia. This will indeed be a significant challenge for our state as it will be for all states as we seek to galvanise commitment to mobilise resources for lifelong learning.

Lifelong Learning: A definition

In South Australia we see lifelong learning as a cradle-to-grave process which involves the continuous development, acquisition and application of knowledge, skills, values and wisdom across the lifespan.

It is our view that lifelong learning includes formal, non-formal, informal and incidental learning activities. It involves all intelligences, nurtures all human dimensions including physical, mental, social and spiritual and leads to personal confidence, resilience and mastery.

But simple definitions never seem to adequately cover the breadth of the lifelong learning concept. Therefore I intend to spend some time on the tri-focus dimensions of the lifelong learning concept. Lifelong learning for us in South Australia has a trilogy of purposes and outcomes relating to personal fulfilment, social development and economic prosperity.

To develop personal fulfilment in individuals we need to generate a love for learning. The value of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for personal growth include those needed to be able to survive, to contribute and to provide leadership. People need to be employable throughout life in a range of ways not necessarily in paid employment but where they feel the sense of personal worth. Equity and spiritual dimensions are also essential elements of lifelong learning in South Australia. Through the application of lifelong learning in our society and through learning communities we'll have more caring citizenship, an improved quality of life, more active participation in our society, cultural richness, better rites of passage and a wider range of people will feel valued and be included in the life of our state.

While some aspects of personal fulfilment and social development are possible without economic prosperity, we do need to have an economy that works and works well. There needs to be innovation, sensible competitiveness and good productivity. We need to act with ecological integrity and develop an economy that is sustainable and resilient.

In South Australia we know that the dual impact of personal fulfilment and social development creates personal confidence. The dual impact of social development and economic prosperity achieves social cohesion and economic prosperity and the dual impact of personal fulfilment creates the capacity for economic resilience. Together these things will assist us in the Learning Society to achieve the status of State of Learning.

Strategies for Commitment

In order to galvanise commitment to lifelong learning, to achieve the status of State of Learning, we have embarked on a range of strategies which can be discussed under the following headings:

- Government policy and priority
- Education system
- Centre for Lifelong Learning & Development
- South Australia Lifelong Learning Advisory Council
- Learning community initiatives
- International and national activity

Government policy and priority

In South Australia we not only have the support of government but the leadership of the Premier who is committed to 'creating a learning society in

which everyone has the opportunity to continue to develop their potential throughout their lives'. Olsen, 2000

In South Australia Lifelong Learning is firmly embedded in State Government policy and into the government's declared outcomes. In the South Australian Statement of Economic Directions, 1999 there is commitment to 'the design of new models for providing lifelong learning services, and opportunities in partnership with local communities, education providers and business' and 'Lifelong Learning in the work place will be promoted and achieved through partnerships amongst providers, industry and research organisations, supported by the Centre for Lifelong Learning & Development'.

But the process did not just begin with these important statements. In order to understand the current situation it is important to look back to what was happening in South Australia in and since 1997.

Education System

In 1997 the South Australian State government education system introduced a declaration for South Australian public education and children's services and in it referred to 'A focus on support for the early years of children's development to ensure that students achieve competencies and attitudes essential for successful lifelong learning'.

Another significant development was the creation of the Department of Education, Training and Employment in 1997 when the educational services which cover early childhood, schooling years, and adult learning were brought together into one organisation with employment and youth. The Department along with a broad range of stakeholders has also been involved in the lengthy and complex task of reforming the Education Act taking into account lifelong learning principles and the creation of the legislative basis for our State of Learning.

This focus on lifelong learning in the education system in the state is illustrated by the range of programs which have clear lifelong learning goals, such as:

- Enterprise Education
- Re-entry Programs
- Early Years Strategy
- Learning to Learning Project

- Adult Community Education Initiatives

Centre For Lifelong Learning & Development

Another major strategy for developing commitment to lifelong learning has been the establishment of the Centre for Lifelong Learning & Development in 1999 by the State Government and located at Flinders University. Its Charter is to boost the level of formal and informal learning for all South Australians and in doing so advance the social development of communities and the economic development of the state.

The Centre has a multiplicity of roles and functions including community capacity building and acts as a broker in creating strategic partnerships to boost learning in South Australia. It is achieving its outcomes through a wide range of programs, projects and activities which include – seminars, information and publications, liaison and partnerships, consultancy services, review and evaluation services, teaching and facilitation and research and development. In particular it has:

- a research & development role through the Premier's Post-graduate Awards and 40 lifelong learning bursaries
- a seminar series which has played a key role in galvanising commitment

Lifelong Learning Advisory Council

Another initiative has been the establishment, this year by the Premier, of the South Australian Lifelong Learning Advisory Council. The Council provides strategic advice to the Centre for Lifelong Learning and Development, assists the Centre to develop and prioritise key future directions, raises issues affecting the successful advancement of lifelong learning in South Australia, promotes lifelong learning and the work of the Centre in business, government and community forums and facilitates the development of new partnerships and alliances between the Centre and the broader community. Members are from the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission, Business and Industry, Flinders, Adelaide and Australian Catholic Universities, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Education, Training and Employment, Adult Community Education Council and the Aboriginal Community.

Learning community initiatives

One of the most exciting initiatives in South Australia is the development of learning communities. As this development gains momentum from:

- Mannum to Mawson Lakes
- Salisbury to Coonalpyn
- Marion to Clare

From the city of Adelaide to the far west of the state, communities are taking action to boost lifelong learning for all members of their suburb or town.

In recent weeks we have received calls from communities such as Clare, Barmera and Jamestown wanting to become learning communities and to become part of this exciting journey as South Australia pursues the objective of being a State of Learning.

International and national activity

The Centre for Lifelong Learning & Development also works nationally with:

- Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)
- Adult Learning Australia (ALA)
- Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER)
- Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET)
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd (NCVER)

and others to ensure we are in step with key research and development findings and that South Australia benefits from national projects.

We have just spent the weekend in the twin cities of Albury/Wodonga where 100 Mayors and councillors from every state of Australia and with five representatives from New Zealand shared their strategies to achieve lifelong learning within Learning Cities.

This applies also to the links between our state and peak international bodies such as:

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- European Commission
- World Bank

For example the World Bank is funding a four day Education Reform and Management Study tour in November for 32 participants from 9 countries to look at learning developments in South Australia. The delegates are from countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Jamaica and Peru.

In creating a State of Learning South Australia has drawn on information from at least 12 countries. We have studied the Learning Towns Network in the UK and we are linked to the UK's Campaign for Learning. We have made connections with learning cities such as Glasgow and we have hosted visits from promoters of lifelong learning from places such as Finland. We have held conferences and run seminars with international speakers.

Strategic Partnerships

In South Australia we realise that many strategic partnerships are necessary to create a State of Learning. Productive partnerships have been developed with business and industry, Local and State government, training providers and government agencies, voluntary organisations, educational institutes and cities and communities.

With strategic partnerships in place lifelong learning is delivered in a range of venues in each learning community and in each learning organisation. Schools and universities are not the only places where learning occurs. Other venues include work places, councils, welfare organisations, regional development boards, museums, art galleries, community clubs, churches, virtual communities and libraries. A State of Learning exists when an effective network of providers is active across the State.

The extent of local, national and international alliances generated to advance lifelong learning in South Australia is impressive. At the local level alliances with companies like Gerard Industries and Normandy Mining along with alliances with the Universities, WEA and Government departments are delivering positive results. On the national front alliances with the Australian Catholic University, Reconciliation Council and the Australian Defence Reserves have been beneficial. International Alliances with the US Department of Education, the Scottish Office, FT Knowledge, The International Association of Educating Cities and others have kept us well informed on global developments. The strategic partnerships of the Centre for Lifelong Learning and Development indicate the richness and the density of an interconnected web or a constellation of strategic partners who are working with and for South Australia's goal of becoming a State of Learning.

Strengthening Commitment

Whilst we have already embarked on strategies to strengthen commitment there are still a number of challenges. For example, how do we ensure that we move from rich beginnings to wide-spread delivery, or from isolated individuals and groups to universal understanding, involvement and commitment?

How do we tackle these questions? Firstly we are addressing and removing barriers to lifelong learning. We are trying to build a critical mass of activity related to lifelong learning across the state. We are promoting the successes of the many groups and individuals actively involved in pursuing lifelong learning and involved in learning organisations and communities. We are setting up structures for sharing information between organisations, communities and individuals. We are encouraging groups to complete the loop by reporting successful outcomes back through appropriate systems, to ensure further resources are committed.

Future Directions

Much has been achieved but there is still a way to go to reach the goal. We intend to provide support for more towns and cities as they address lifelong learning and establish themselves as learning communities. We aim to expand the number of organisations that are committed to becoming learning organisations. We will increase the links between organisations and communities across the state and improve the participation level of individuals in active learning.

But South Australia can only excel as a State of Learning if we are successful in galvanising commitment to lifelong learning through strategic partnerships through mobilising resources for making lifelong learning a reality for all South Australians.

REFERENCES

Longworth, N, *Making Lifelong Learning Work: Learning Cities for a Learning Century*, Kagan Page Ltd, 1999

Ralph, Denis W, *Learning Communities: The Return of Camelot?*

Centre for Lifelong Learning and Development, July 2000

Olsen, Hon J MP, Premier of South Australia, *Presentation of Premier Scholarships, Centre for Lifelong Learning and Development*, 17 October 2000

South Australian State Government, *Statement of Economic Directions*, 1999

Foundations for the Future, A declaration for South Australian public education and children's services, Department of Education and Children's Services, 1997