

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning

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Submitter: Ms Fiona McIlroy

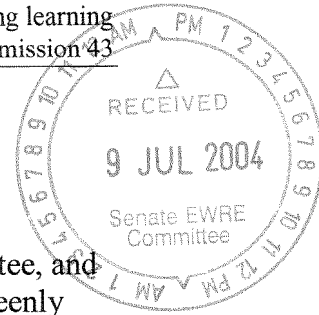
Organisation:

Address:

Phone:

Fax:

Email: fionam@homemail.com.au



Personal submission

As an adult educator, life coach, member of ALA, ex-member of the Committee, and author of a paper delivered at the 2001 ALA Conference in Canberra, I am keenly interested in the future development of adult learning in Canberra.

This is a short submission, since it is late, and I did not see the call for submissions till two days ago.

Lifelong learning is the touchstone of adult education, and it is the key to personal and professional development, particularly in the context of rapid technological changes.

We are living longer, and our skills base needs to change day by day.

Certain skills and understandings are not, I believe, keeping pace with the speed of technological advances. These relate to the dimension of well-being, relationships and understanding of how to live a good, loving and fulfilling life in a diverse social context.

More emphasis and resources should be placed on the development of these key understandings and skills to enable co-operation to keep up with the competition of the 'economic growth'. 90% of Australians work in a negative culture of blame, indecision and conformity, according to a study of 900 organisations (Human Synergistics 2003)

Is this evidence enough of the need to bring better personal and social skills into management and workplaces. Families are suffering a rise in divorce and depression is rife. Those not in work are alienated and isolated.

There are a few ways I can immediately recommend to address these needs.

Conversation Cafes are a fledgling model of community connectedness in many cities. They bring people together with diverse backgrounds to exchange views, and after regular meetings with no venue costs or infrastructure, participants have been found to gain confidence, further projects, combine energies for socially worthwhile causes, swap resources and information, build networks.

Funding is only required for a facilitator to seed new groups, advertise and speak at meetings of interested people.

Social capital ventures are often not expensive. They need time to develop and patience.

Singing groups are a great way to build social cohesion and creative expression. Art, walking, sporting and cultural groups can be a lifelong learning tool. We need to bring them to people more than just offer them in the local church or community centre.

The learning @ work day initiative with Adult Learners Week was successful. Why not support workplaces to build it into their week. There are many trainers and workshop leaders in the community with skills for informal learning with no way to promote their courses or skills. Large organisations use large Human Resource companies, by preference.

I recommend funding a channel for promoting such informal adult learning providers. In such a small city, there are not, as Charles Landry put it, many crooked streets and hidden odd corners of the city. There are certain channels of communication, and a lot depends on who you know etc.

To build a creative and energetic city where knowledge is truly valued as it could be in a city where the educated population is at a high level, we could foster an informal learning sector with varied outlets and mechanisms for building social capital and enriching social cohesion and co-operative learning. Learning Circles could be more known and promoted, with a broad range of topics.

A symposium on Resilience in the Canberra Community in September will be tapping into and exploring the nature of resilience on a personal and social level. This we hope will lead to various focus groups and better networks to build social capital.

An ageing baby boomer population will no doubt ask for more culture within easy access for older people, and learning through U3A etc will snowball. All that wisdom can be shared with the rest of the community if there is a will to break down the walls between the Aged and the Youth.

We all have something to share with one another. Let's make it easier to do so, and this means innovative social mechanisms, and challenging stereotypes and organisational inertia.

Long live lifelong learning in the ACT

So says Fiona McIlroy of Inspire ACT

Thank you all.

Laughter in the corridors will become commonplace!