

Submission to

Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the progress and future direction of lifelong learning

Submitter: Jim Saleeba

Organization: Australian Learning Communities Network (ALCN)

Address: PO Box 923 Wodonga 3689

Phone: 02 6022 9218

Fax: 02 6022 9346

Email: jsaleeba@wodonga.vic.gov.au

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- A. Policies and strategies aimed at addressing the life-long learning needs of an ageing population**
- B. The ways in which technological developments, particularly the Internet, have affected the nature and delivery of life-long learning since 1997**
- C. The adequacy of any structural and policy changes at Commonwealth and State or Territory level which have been made in response to these technological developments**
- D. Technological barriers to participation in life-long learning and adult and community education, and the ways in which these might be overcome**
- E. The extent to which training, professional development and role of adult educators has kept pace with or been influenced by technological and on-line developments since 1997**
- F. Re-training strategies as an element in life-long learning, especially for those living in rural and regional areas.**

Submission to Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education References Committee

This is a general response by the Australian Learning Communities Network (ALCN) to the Senate enquiry in that the Learning Community Concept provides an approach to the solution of the challenges raised in the Terms of Reference.

What is the Australian Learning Communities Network (ALCN)

ALCN is a network of leading edge practitioners building sustainable communities using learning as a key element. It was formed in 2001 and its membership has grown very quickly.

It aims to:

- Advocate for the enhancement of learning communities at National State and Regional Levels.
- Encourage community leadership to explore the dynamic concept of sustainability within communities
- Conduct field research and develop framework measures for the benefit of Learning communities
- Provide strategic broad sectoral networking opportunities to positively influence Learning Community practice
- Promote the value of Learning communities

Membership is drawn across Australia and includes:

Learning City Bendigo
Widebay Volunteers
Geelong Adult Training and Education Gate
Horsham: A Learning Town
Lithgow City Council
The Centre, Wangaratta
Wycheproof Community Resource Centre
City of Wodonga
Harrington Projects
Kath Dickson Family Centre
Kyabram Learning Centre
Ballarat: A learning City
Maroochy Libraries
Morrison House
Shire of Melton
City of Mandurah
RMIT University
RMIT Hamilton
Canberra Institute of Technology
Bingara Shire Council
Spencer TAFE Port Augusta Campus
Newcastle City Council
The Smith Family
Victoria University
Lifelong Learning Council Inc Queensland
Shire of Yarra Ranges
District Council of the Copper Coast

The Need for a Learning Community¹

A learning community by its very nature responds to the local conditions. Therefore, the model adapts to those circumstances and the size of the community does not matter. Thus within the ALCN, there are quite small regions to the very large.

Thus a learning community can be a village, town, city or region that is preparing for the rapidly emerging knowledge-based society by

- Using the concept of lifelong learning as an organising principle and social goal
- Mobilising learning resources (knowledge and skills) of all five of its sectors (civic, public(health and social agencies etc.) economic, education from early years to University, and voluntary
- Making practical but imaginative use of learning technologies as a tool to achieve the objectives that are set and owned by the community

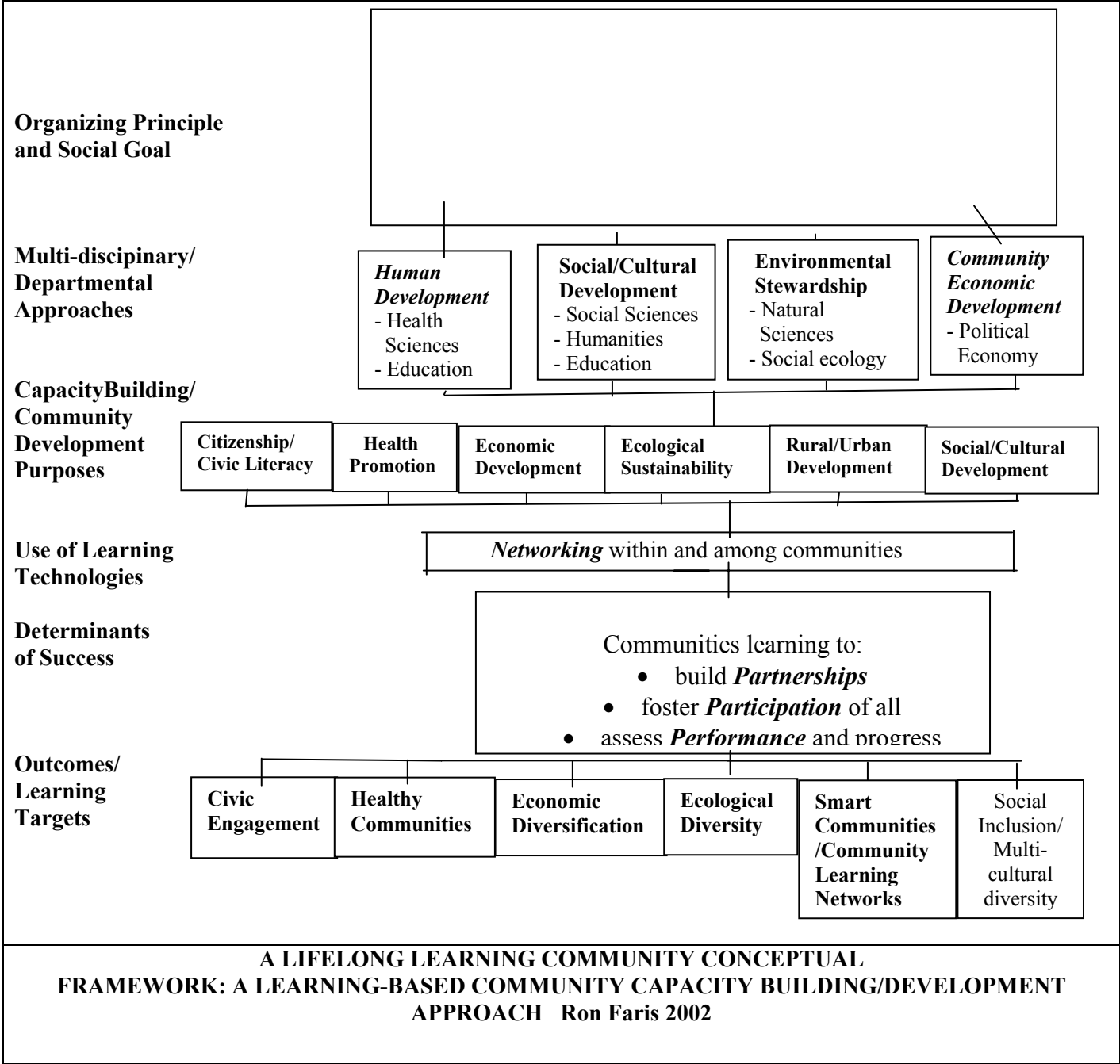
The learning community thus becomes a network of social learning relationships both within its own community and from other learning communities interested in sharing best practice, problems and solutions. The learning communities are created by community members who know and care about their own communities.

Sustainable individual and community change is possible only if learning occurs. The acquisition of new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values is the only guarantee that old, dysfunctional habits are replaced by new ways of responding to and managing change in the 21st century.

The following diagram gives a diagrammatic representation of a Learning Community Framework

The above brief description of the learning community is necessary for understanding the reason for the learning community as a medium that supports and underpins life Long learning.

¹ This following section draws heavily on the work of a Canadian colleague, Dr Ron Faris



A National Framework

The ALCN has made representations over recent years to the Commonwealth Government and its relevant departments about the need for a national lifelong learning framework or policy for the following reasons.

- A national policy/framework, in which a learning community concept sits, would give an imprimatur to the work in the field and assist in the alleviation of the currently required self-justification.
- A national policy would give bring some coherence to the fragmentary nature of Lifelong learning as it exists around Australia.
- A national policy/framework would give the rationale for any allocation of resources.
- A national policy/framework would bring together the various initiatives around lifelong learning into one document.

Scope of the national framework for Lifelong Learning

The ALCN would see the policy/framework as covering the following possible topics.

- Context
 - Need for greater cohesion
- Rationale:
 - Why learning matters
 - Effecting the required sea change
- Policy objectives
 - Related Government objectives
- Governing principles
 - Lifelong and life wide
 - Definitions
 - All parts of the education, training and learning industry required to make a contribution for widespread learning to occur
 - Role of partnerships
 - Entitlements
 - What is the entitlement? Universal secondary or universal post secondary? Basic literacy?
 - Principles for public funding
 - Widening participation
 - Engaging the reluctant and disaffected learner
 - Learning in the home, community and the family
 - Role of libraries, galleries and museums
 - Adult learning role
 - Opportunities for the disabled and those with learning difficulties
 - Lifting barriers to education/learning
 - Learning pathways

- Funding Learning
 - Current funding
 - New initiatives in Government funding
 - Individual Learning accounts?
 - Priorities

- Community empowerment
 - Decentralising learning decision making
 - Local work force development
 - Knowledge of local learning opportunities
 - Community collaboration
 - Information and advice
 - Individual learning accounts?

- Flexibility
 - Role of online technology
 - Access to learning

- Learning at work
 - Developing a learning habit at work
 - New skills for the information economy?
 - Helping small firms to learn
 - The development of skills
 - Priorities
 - Clusters and learning

- Sharing responsibility: Partnerships

- Quality and accountability
 - Recognition of achievement
 - Maintaining & raising standards
 - Credit transfer
 - Recognition of prior Learning
 - Priorities

- Maintain relevance:
 - Research