



# The Challenge of Change: The Lifeline of Learning

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As we enter the new millennium, the pace of change seems to be forever increasing. Whether socially, culturally, technologically, environmentally or in other ways, our lives are constantly changing and there seems to be more and more to learn. This challenge applies in virtually every aspect of our lives: in the home, at work, in the community, even in leisure pursuits. The amount of new information, the complexity of systems, and the range of new technologies all require continuous updating and new learning. And no one is exempt from these pressures: From the oldest to the youngest, from the city to the bush, in every walk of life, people have to become lifelong learners simply to survive, much less to advance.

Throughout the world, but particularly in OECD countries like Australia, people are coming to realise that cities are more than simply places where large numbers of people live. They are also places where people work, study, relax and interact with others: in short, places which revolve around learning. As a result, many cities in Europe, Scandinavia, Britain and North America have designated themselves as **Learning Cities** or **Learning Communities**. Although no two learning cities are identical, in each case the basic approach to their development and evolution has been the same; namely, to use learning explicitly as a key source of economic regeneration, of democratic participation and of social inclusiveness.

With the increasing impact of globalisation, Australia can't afford to ignore such a significant international movement, and it seems inevitable that if we want to be a prosperous, competitive, economically viable and socially inclusive society, we need to pay more attention to providing greater opportunities for everyone to learn, irrespective of who they are, where they live, what they do, or their previous educational attainments.

In July 1998, after attending the First European Conference on Learning Cities held in Southampton, Phil Candy from the University of Ballarat gave a public presentation in the Ballarat Town Hall. The presentation, was jointly sponsored by Business Ballarat and the Ballarat Education Network, and subsequently

led to the establishment of the 'Learning City Taskforce,' a loose and fairly representative consortium of about twelve people with an inner core of five. Throughout the past year and a half, every attempt has been made to include four distinct groups of stakeholders in the discussions and negotiations about becoming a learning city. These are:

1. **the community generally**, including churches, service clubs, social action groups and those associated especially with youth and senior citizens;
2. **the education and training providers** – public and private;
3. **the business community**, including manufacturing, services and retail; and
4. **local government** (principally through economic development, but including social planning).

The Taskforce has sponsored a number of events, including a visit by the Mayor of Wodonga (Councillor Graham Crapp) which has formally declared itself to be a learning city; public lectures and presentations in Ballarat by noted futurist (the late) Robert Theobald; and an extended visit (including presentations, seminars and meetings) by staff from the Learning and Business Link Company from Kent <<http://www.lbl.co.uk>>. The concept of Ballarat as a Learning City has been repeatedly mentioned in articles and editorials in the local newspaper – *The Courier* – and there is now reasonably widespread interest in and support for the idea. Not unexpectedly, this support comes from a diverse range of perspectives including business development and job creation, civic participation and social inclusion, and personal empowerment and enhanced employability. Certainly the concept of the Learning City is broad and flexible enough to encompass all these dimensions, and Ballarat is now moving towards becoming a Learning City as a means of focusing interest, energy and resources on creating and promoting these opportunities.