

THE LEARNING CITY OF GLASGOW

Shanti Wong, Project Director, SmartGeelong – the Learning City

Faced with rising unemployment and some of the highest areas of deprivation in Scotland, Glasgow is transforming itself from its industrial past to a city that competes strongly in the knowledge based economy of the 21st Century. Glasgow is well resourced with learning opportunities and the challenge is to reach the high proportion of its population who are marginalised by rapid change and the disappearance of low skilled work.

In Glasgow, although the unemployment rate is 4%:

- 33% of young people leave school without qualifications.
- 60% of Glasgow's population of 600 000 are regarded as non learners.
- Between 5 and 15% of its population (depending on locality) participate in Higher Education cf 45% in Scotland as a whole.
- Half the children in the city live in poverty.
- 35 000 families live in poverty.

Educational disadvantage is higher where there are multiple factors of deprivation in areas such as North Glasgow that include lower skilled employment, high rates of public housing tenancy, higher rates of illness and death, poorer nutrition and higher levels of drug use and crime (Glasgow the Learning City, Barriers to Access to Learning, Glasgow Learning Alliance, 2000).

The Learning City solution

Alternatives to traditional ways of doing things take time to implement and Glasgow chose to become a Learning City as a strategy to fast track initiatives that might address its serious problems. Glasgow is not a member of the Learning City Network, choosing to focus on local issues and building relationships locally. Glasgow has now been a Learning City long enough to have recruited and developed key people in its alliances. These people are characterised not by being figureheads but by being active people who can influence change.

Now several years into its Learning City initiatives, Glasgow is starting to collect data that will measure new participation in learning that is defined more broadly than just formal qualifications. Early research by the Learning City found that an emphasis on qualifications as motivation to learn is doomed to fail. The current work on data collection focuses on tracking people on their learning journeys and is finding that there is a reduction in the measure of the college dropout rate because people are making better choices about their learning programs. This data tracking is being given a five year outlook to demonstrate outcomes.

As a Learning City, Glasgow is finding that it is in a position to capitalise on unexpected initiatives such as the establishment of the first Scottish Parliament in 1999. The Parliament has engendered a renewed interest in Scottish culture and is developing a new learning focus for the community.

SNAPSHOTS of effective practice

REAL

www.intoreal.com

The major strategy of the Learning City for widening participation has been Real. The Real partnership was established in 1999 among representatives from Further and Higher Education, the City Council and Scottish Enterprise Glasgow.

The Real aim:

'To provide Glasgow's citizens with the highest quality learning possible at all levels and in accessible ways' (Clark, p13).

The emphasis on the branding of Real has been a considered strategy for developing awareness of learning opportunities and ensuring access by the people who are most difficult to reach. Currently focused as an ICT based learning strategy, Real is now available to the general public in schools and libraries throughout Glasgow.

The Real product

Real provides access to online and virtual learning through the provision of a Real Toolbox to member enterprises that includes computer hardware and software, internet access and training. In each enterprise, Learning Champions are recruited to provide ongoing support and momentum for the learning process. These champions are trained in basic ICT tuition and mentoring and an induction package has been developed that is now available to others.

Membership based, Real now has 10 000 individual and business members. Business membership is growing at 100% per quarter. There are 32 Real Learning Centres in libraries, 98 in small businesses and 2 in universities. An interesting example of the influence of the Real initiative is Glasgow Caledonian University. This university has not applied for a startup kit but chose to develop its own online learning facility based on the Real model. A large ICT access centre with 150 computer stations has been established that is presently available for staff and students but will be accessible by the community once security arrangements have been made. The centre incorporates a coffee shop and encourages people to have their coffee while they use the computers. Their reasoning is that people should feel relaxed while they are using the centre and that keyboards are cheap to replace if there are any spills. Several stations also have groups of chairs around a computer so that people can learn together.

As part of the current measurement strategy, learner numbers (not including casual users of the internet) are tracked by library information management systems. Voluntary Learning Plans are developed for individuals and these will be built on to provide information for the measurement strategy.

Real Achievements

'Real in a Box' - Engaging Business

Parallel provision of the online learning facility in libraries is also available to businesses to enable open access to ICT learning by all employees in each enterprise that joins. It is a requirement of the contract that employees can engage in learning programs during their paid work time. 'Real in a Box' has been attractive and unifying and businesses that have joined have indicated that they like to be part of a community wide initiative. The Workers Education Association (WEA) has been contracted by the Learning City to implement this initiative and has been instrumental in developing the relationships with businesses. Real has many members who represent the small business sector but also four major corporations that have joined.

The Marriott Hotel is one of these and it has provided additional computers to those that came with the Real startup kit. The learning facility is set up in a small room in the hotel and is available to all staff at any time – 24 hours a day. Participants are using the facility for a full range of learning activity from formal, graduate level programs to browsing on the internet. Through its designated Learning Champion, the Marriott Hotel is willing to promote the Real program to other enterprises and is a valuable partner in the program for the Learning City.

'Real in a Box' requires a financial contribution by business members of AUD\$1200. However, payment of the fee is problematic and a payment up front strategy is proposed for new members.

Specific online business training is available at extra cost to Real business members and this can include online tuition as well as face to face training. The ongoing internet costs are met by the company. The bulk purchase of multiple software licenses that can then be passed on at discount prices is also being investigated by the Learning City team.

Real in the Swimming Centre

A highly innovative partnership model is a Real Learning Centre co located with the library and the local indoor swimming centre. Overlooking the pool, the computer training rooms enable families to participate in enjoyable learning activities together. The Swimming Pool has recorded a 40% increase in membership since the establishment of Real and is providing emerging evidence of the correlation between learning and improved community health.

'Local Investigations'

This is a community project that includes an online component and arose out of the expressed interests of community users of Real facilities. 'Local Investigations' is now accredited and includes programs such as Family History, History of Football Teams and Local History and continues to be developed as people use Real for personal investigative work.

Future directions

Maintaining the Real momentum

Now well established in a range of enterprises, Real requires ongoing development to maintain the momentum. Learning City staff are currently investigating new learning programs and are involved in the development of online materials that particularly meet the expressed needs of businesses. The WEA has again been contracted to develop 'Learning Bites' - modular online content that can be used across a range of programs.

A new Learning Network of Real business members is planned to generate ongoing interest and provide input for new learning requirements. Another network of Learning Champions is also being formed to develop new skills in addressing issues that arise for them in the implementation of Real, such as reluctance to release employees during paid work time.

Marketing of 'Real in a Box' is entirely built on word of mouth and relationships. There is no advertising or media exposure and business membership is progressing on target to 120 by March 2002. This includes 820 learners who will have signed up to the Voluntary Learning Plan. This approach ensures the maintenance of quality as well as management of the demand.

Focus for the Future

Enabling Framework

This project aims to produce a matrix of requirements for a community to operate as a Learning City. Examples of these are expected to include ICT infrastructure, curriculum, pedagogy and partnerships. The intention is that the matrix can then be used to benchmark Learning Cities and chart their progress. It could prove a useful tool for determining the difference between cities that have declared a commitment to lifelong learning as Learning Cities and those that have not.

Literacy

20% of Glasgow is functionally illiterate. This is a consequence of the lack of national and local literacy initiatives over many years. There has been no funded adult literacy provision in Scotland since 1975. A renewed national focus on adult literacy has been initiated but Glasgow has determined that it cannot wait for these to become effective and has begun work on self managed community activist projects. A serious issue that Glasgow is attempting to address through its literacy development is the lack of qualified and experienced literacy teachers for adults.

'You can count the number of qualified adult literacy tutors in Scotland on the fingers of one hand.'

Stephanie Young, Senior Director, Employability, Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, 2002

Experience Economy

Glasgow is planning to investigate how the emerging ideas of the 'Experience Economy' shape the development of tourism, museums and visitor attractions. The 'Hard Fun' that so engages young people in internet games, pinball machines and interactive video games is being researched to identify how these media develop learning. This project will look at how more of these ideas can be incorporated in further learning program development.

Strategies for engaging new learners

Attractive marketing products are a feature of Glasgow as a Learning City. In addition to the branding of the Real Learning Centres, booklets and promotional material for new audiences have been widely disseminated:

School to work transition

As a strategy for changing pessimism to optimism and to catch young people before they drop out of school, the Learning City has developed two publications to be used as a basis for preparing for the transition from school to work. 'The Worx' is used in Year 9 in all Glasgow schools with 6000 young people annually. Lesson plans are available for teachers and evaluation of the program indicates positive outcomes.

'The Low Down' is a newer publication for 18-35 year olds and 4000 copies are distributed annually through the 130 members of the Adult Guidance Network.

These publications are funded in partnership with the City Council, the Adult Guidance Network and ethnic support groups.

Creative Industries Workshops

One or two week workshops in the Creative Industries are available to young people in their own time. In these workshops, the participants explore multimedia, film making, performance, music and design integrated with programs to build interpersonal skills and self esteem. Outcomes include a renewed interest in learning that is demonstrated in school as well as pathways into further education and careers in the creative industries.

This program largely attracts young people who are not achieving as well as might be expected and is recommended to them by teachers as a strategy for stimulating learning skills. The outcomes are indicating that it is possible to generate these skills by short term alternative programs that result in longer term positive changes back in mainstream education.

Digital Inclusion

The Learning City's research indicates that women take up opportunities for lifelong learning much more quickly than men. A strategy to engage older men who are unemployed or underemployed, the Digital Inclusion project is experimenting with alternative ways for men to participate in learning programs.

Only one third of Scottish households have access to a computer and the situation is more acute in Glasgow. As a result, people are not aware of the impact of ICT on their lives, have less access and lower ICT skill levels. (Digital Glasgow, Donald MacPhee, Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, 2002). This initiative will concentrate on the individual and is developing relevant online content that will support participation in learning. Learning Champions are being recruited and the project aims through footwork and word of mouth combined with the mobile provision of laptop computers to get to people who are hidden beyond the aspirational groups.

Challenges for the Learning City

All of this work is done with existing resources, directly from the Scottish government. Glasgow has chosen to use its resources this way but is not compelled to. Through Scottish Enterprise, local government has directed funds into lifelong learning rather than vocational education as a strategy for long term cultural change.

The employment patterns are complicated. Although the unemployment rate in Glasgow has dropped from 12% in 1994 to 4% in 2002 the economic activity rate is very poor and 85 000 people collect invalid benefits. This excludes them from the unemployment statistics and means that poverty and health remain significant problems.

The majority of employed people commute into Glasgow to work and consequently take their wealth out of the city itself to the increasingly prosperous regional areas in which they live. While unemployment rates have dropped significantly, the population has also halved over the last 50 years. One third of the city's workforce has no qualifications and many Glaswegians do not have the skills to compete effectively for jobs in the city – even unskilled jobs (Clark, p9-11).

However, 'there is a strong sense that Glasgow has turned the corner' (Clark, p 9). It is the largest retail centre in the UK outside London and has an international reputation for arts and culture. The city has also enjoyed the highest economic growth in employment in the UK outside London. As a Learning City, Glasgow is committed to the development of a culture of lifelong learning so that it will thrive in the complex global environment of the 21st Century.