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Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

100,000 heads are better than one

Lessons from the world's largest
online learning community

for school leaders

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“ talk2learn has helped me overcome that element of isolation from which many heads suffer ”

“ It has opened a new world of contacts and opportunities for professional dialogue ”

“ The wisdom of other heads was invaluable in shaping what we eventually developed ”

“ I think talk2learn has been of seminal importance ”

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Foreword

Welcome to 100,000 heads are better than one

I am really pleased to see the third version of this book being published. The book is packed full of ideas, tips and insights into effective online communities that have been drawn from our extensive experience in talk2learn, the College's ground breaking online learning community environment.

The feedback we received to **edition one and two of 70,000 heads** from people across the country and internationally has been very positive with the book now being used as a resource to support a number of leadership and community development programmes.

Links are given to appropriate sections of the toolkit throughout this book to help you with developing your own online learning spaces:

www.ncsl.org.uk/elearningfacilitationtoolkit

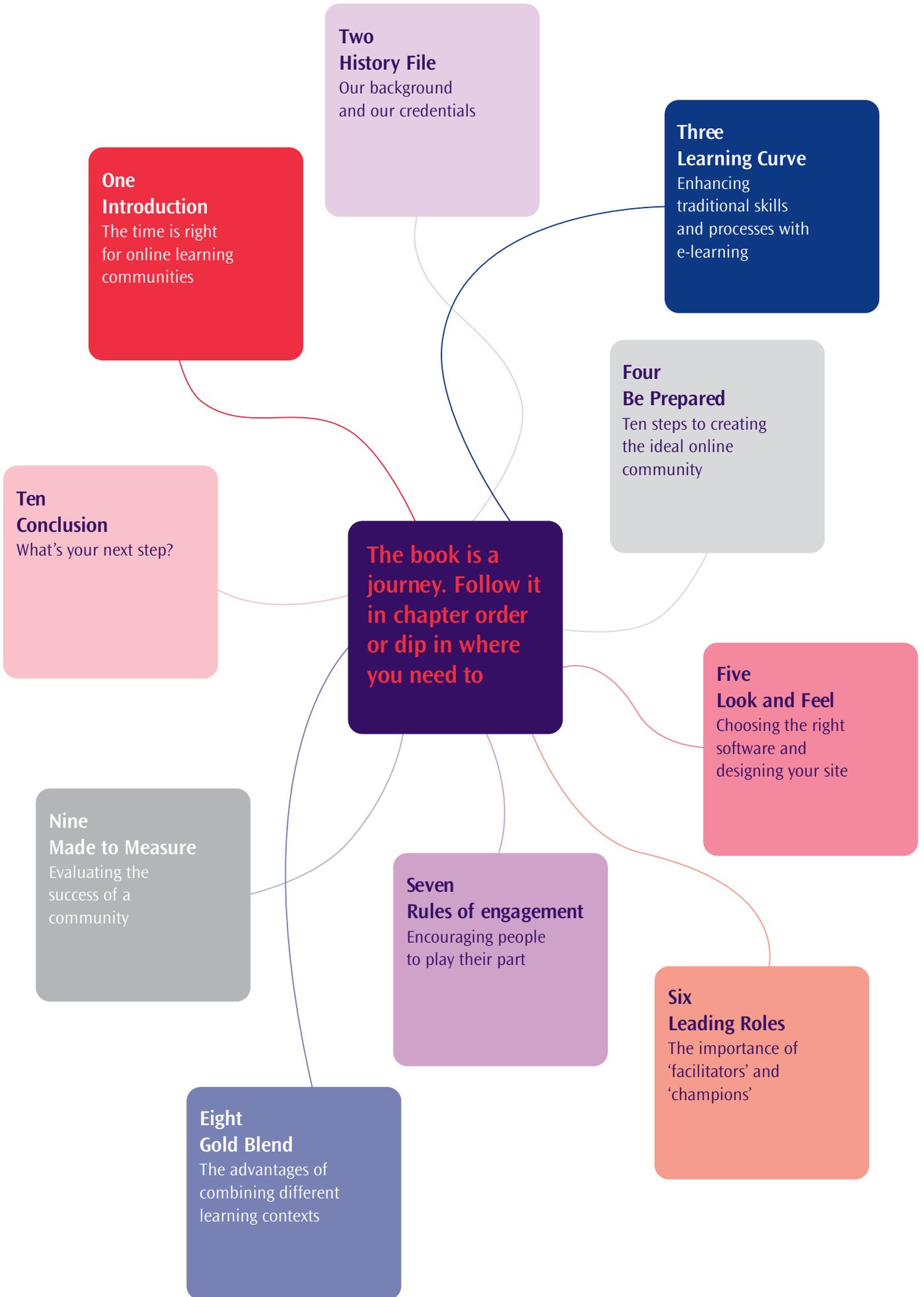
There is no doubt that online communities have come a long way since the early days of the internet. The use of communities such as YouTube, MySpace are a testament to the rapid growth of informal learning spaces. We have seen social software develop with **virtual learning environments**, blogs and wiki's becoming increasingly common place. Opportunities for learning are becoming more diverse, sometimes more informal and, I believe, much more enticing.

Online learning communities offer a new and exciting dimension for education within and beyond the school walls. We hope this book will help you make the most of the opportunities. Whether you are a participant in an online community, a facilitator or someone who is responsible for setting up an online community.



Jonathan Dale

Operational Director, e-learning
National College for School Leadership



One Introduction

Why we have written this book

Since its launch in 2000, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) has made a significant investment in online learning communities and brought thousands of school leaders together to learn in talk2learn, its bespoke online learning environment. We are sharing much of that experience with you in this book.

We aim to:

- demonstrate the **powerful benefits** online learning communities can bring to the professional development of school leaders and others
- offer **ideas, tips, guidance, a toolkit and opportunities for CPD** to schools and others thinking about establishing their own communities
- for easy online referencing follow the tabs throughout the booklet. To link to the appropriate sections of the supporting online toolkit.

Toolkit

Basic facilitator skills

Underpinning all of our work in this area is the belief that **authentic collaboration** between education professionals and, potentially, other stakeholders is a valuable tool that will help to fulfil our common aim of improving children's learning opportunities.

But we also hope to show how online learning communities can help school leaders to tackle some of the specific challenges they now face as education undergoes a major transformation.

Change is rippling through the system, requiring leaders to rethink their roles in improving the structures and partnerships within which they work.

In addition, the ever-increasing complexity of headteachers' responsibilities, as well as the need to operate beyond traditional school boundaries, demand **new approaches to leadership and expects the leadership of learning.**

Schools are working with an increasingly wide range of people including local communities, professionals from other agencies, organisations and the voluntary sector. Meanwhile, the Children's Act 2004, the Every Child Matters Agenda, workforce reform and Building Schools of the Future are altering the educational landscape significantly.

The national headteacher standards for England emphasise the need to make use of **emerging technologies for teaching and learning**, to know about the strengths, capabilities and objectives of other schools and to build and maintain effective relationships with parents, carers, partners and the community to enhance the education of all pupils.

Personalised, tailored learning for pupils and others is another engine of change.

We believe that online learning communities have a huge contribution to make in all these areas.

By working together online, formally and informally, in subject-specific areas and by taking part in hotseat discussions with policy-makers, key thinkers and government ministers, school leaders can add a new dimension to their professional development. And the evidence shows that this new approach has a positive impact on the learning of people in an organisation.

This book will take the reader through a journey from the initial preparation for an online community, through the issues of project planning, choosing the right software and creating the right community space and on to facilitation, online engagement and the evaluation of the community's impact.

Toolkit

Basic facilitator skills

As well as dipping in and out of this book, you can also use the materials at **www.ncsl.org.uk/communities and www.ncsl.org.uk/elearningfacilitationtoolkit**. Here you will find **additional support**, longer versions of some of the articles printed here and a wealth of further references for advice, guidance and professional development.

New and emerging technologies spawn their own, sometimes esoteric terminology. To help, we've compiled a glossary, a **jargon-buster** that explains some of the more unwieldy terms and phrases (see appendix A).

There is much more to understand about online communities and their potential to enhance learning. The world is getting smaller and technology continues to create new and exciting ways for everyone to learn. We should build learning opportunities that reflect these changes.

The challenges are there. We believe this book can help you to meet them.

Two

The history file

The development of talk2learn, NCSL's online environment supporting learning communities

This chapter looks at:

- the evolution of talk2learn
- the emergence of programme-specific communities
- refining the tool

In talk2learn, NCSL has developed one of the largest online environments of educational learning communities in the world. When the first edition of this book was written there were around 100,000 school leaders registered in talk2learn, there are now over 105,000 registered users.

Participants include headteachers, deputies, middle-level leaders, school business managers, advanced skills teachers, Fast Track teachers, programme tutors and facilitators plus a range of other interested parties and local working groups. Talk2learn continues to include a wider audience of professionals, particularly with the increasing impact of the Every Child Matters agenda. In addition, **guest experts and policy-makers** are regularly invited to take part.

Talking Heads

talk2learn has, in fact, been in existence longer than NCSL itself. It was launched in February 2000 as Talking Heads, a research and development venture for Ultralab, which was the educational research and technology think tank at Anglia Ruskin University.

Utilising the think.com software developed by Oracle and Ultralab, Talking Heads worked with a pilot group of 1,200 headteachers to find out how online communities could support school leaders in three key tasks. These were to:

- reduce isolation among newly appointed heads
- promote the sharing of good practice
- offer emotional and professional support

Learning messages

Where have we been?

What have we learned?

Access to the communities was through a website, something then relatively new to most heads generally familiar only with email and mailing lists, and Ultralab employed 24 training and support staff. When NCSL was established in 2000, the Talking Heads communities became part of its remit.

Virtual Heads

NCSL used the think.com technology to create another online community for participants in the revised National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH). Virtual Heads offers general information and hotseats. The online community has gone through several development stages and currently offers a dynamic mixture of general information, hotseats with experts and colleagues: national and special interest discussion and insightful blogs.

Virtual heads continues to develop as NCSL learns more about collaborative learning.

Increased participation in Talking Heads and Virtual Heads led to the formation of additional working groups. Some local teams of school leaders used think.com to support their own needs in small collaborative projects while others with a common interest came together.

New communities

Two more overarching communities were subsequently established.

NCSL in Dialogue enables professionals and experts from inside and outside education to explore key leadership issues. **Policy in action** brings together policy-makers and school leaders and has quickly become the focal point for consultation on policy. It enables school leaders to engage directly with government ministers such as David Bell, Charles Clarke (when he was Education Secretary) and Jacqui Smith (as Schools Minister) on major talking points.

Talk2learn offers online dialogue with leading thinkers in the world of education, policy makers and government ministers. Online guests have included Edward de Bono, Michael Barber and Tim Brighouse.

This kind of access, unimaginable outside the online community environment, is a rare and very valuable opportunity for headteachers to influence current thinking and to register their views at the highest level.

Online communities are also built into each of NCSL's range of programmes as part of the blend of learning experiences such as the training of school business managers. Similarly, Strategic Leadership of ICT (SLICT), Leading from the Middle and New Visions all have their own communities to support programme activities.

External communities have sprung from NCSL's wider reach including Primary Strategy consultant leaders, and there has been marked growth in the number of communities that support other national projects. The government's Innovation Unit, for example, uses talk2learn to engage a wider range of school leaders and education professionals in debate and discussion.

Internationally, talk2learn is used by the **Principals Network in New Zealand** and smaller groups around the world are experimenting with online communities, often following briefing visits to NCSL's Learning and Conference Centre in Nottingham.

Refining the community environment

In the beginning, Talking Heads and Virtual Heads both used think.com software which was originally developed for the 7–13 age group. Its tools include brainstorming sessions, conversations, hotseats and debates and it allows users to create their own home pages, upload a user icon and publish and share files including documents, audio files and videos.

In September 2003, the system was relaunched with a more mature look and feel and the name changed to talk2learn, but NCSL decided a more radical re-think was still required.

Following a year-long collaboration between NCSL, Fronter and LogicaCMG, the new talk2learn software was launched in December 2004. Retaining much of the original functionality, it features a wider range of collaborative elements, new page publishing facilities, live chat, voting and a survey tool. **Better knowledge management** features are being developed which will enable us to capture the results of discussions and share them with a wider leadership audience. These features include podcasting and talk2learn highlights



Toolkit

Facilitator presence

Facilitation

NCSL now has its own team of predominantly home-based e-learning specialists. The role continues to evolve as understanding of online collaboration grows but one thing is strikingly obvious: facilitation is essential in online communities if they are to succeed. Simply creating a community space and leaving participants to manage themselves does not create successful, vibrant communities nor sustain long-term interest and activity (see chapter 6).

Conclusion

The concept of online collaboration is still relatively new and our knowledge about effective practice, the skills of the leaders and even the technology itself continues to develop and evolve.

Toolkit

The theory

Collaborative learning

One thing, however, is crystal clear. Effective online collaboration helps to reduce isolation and, by enabling school leaders to share insights into practice, develops the capacity for school improvement. Users do, however, need to **understand the philosophy, value and purpose** of participating in an online community. They should also realise that effective participation requires time and commitment as well as an open mind towards new collaborative and transparent ways of working.

NCSL must keep growing and nurturing this new culture of online collaboration so that it includes and influences the entire profession.

The original aim, as expressed by NCSL in 2000, remains valid:

To generate a virtual community of school leaders where community members actively engage in productive online activities at a time that is convenient to them.
(NCSL think tank)

For further information, references and guidance, go to www.ncsl.org.uk/communities.

Three

The learning curve

Where e-learning meets established pedagogy

This chapter explains where online learning and communities fit into prevailing theories on learning. It examines:

- behaviourist, constructivist and cultural theories
- how these theories apply online

If learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills and online learning means that this takes place through the use of technology, then the process might be thought to be relatively straightforward to unpick.

However, learning is a complex process and there have been many theories describing how it might be brought about. Behaviourist, constructivist and cultural (or collaborative) learning theories have been in and out of fashion over the last 50 years. Added to that, the online world is constantly changing.

The online e-learning facilitator toolkit brings to life the theories covered in the following pages.

The following table shows how the various recognised pedagogic theories look when transferred to an online context.

Toolkit

The theory

Learning message

E-learning uses technology to enhance traditional skills and processes.

Theory	Key theorists	Online activities
Behaviourist: conditioning 'Learning is change in behaviour'	Skinner (1954)	Online, this involves instruction followed by a reinforcement of online responses. Drawbacks of this approach are that incorrect responses are not dealt with since there are no diagnostic or remedial strategies. There is no space for reflection and intervention by the student.
Behaviourist: programmed learning 'Learning is change in behaviour'	Gagne (1974)	Programmed learning varies in complexity in terms of task design, allowing the conditions for learning in the programme to be engineered to meet different objectives. It is a development of the previous method but still involves instruction, drill and practice. It is often too pre-structured, allowing little initiative by the student or any recognition of student difference.

Theory	Key theorists	Online activities
<p>Cognitive: constructivist ‘Learners construct their understanding of the world through their interactions with it’</p>	<p>Piaget (1971) Papert (1980)</p>	<p>Constructivism places an emphasis on learner-centred and discovery activities. These allow knowledge assimilation, accommodation and construction. Papert created LOGO to provide opportunities for experimentation, reflection and abstraction. Pure online discovery is too abstract and it has been shown that learning needs to be grounded in terms of context. It also needs to be guided and supported.</p>
<p>Cultural: social constructivist ‘Learning occurs in a social context’</p>	<p>Vygotsky (1978)</p>	<p>This links higher order thinking, the influence of the situation and the role of someone who scaffolds the learning process for the learners in an online tutoring activity. The language used in the dialogue, the context in which the dialogue takes place (including the tutor and the community) influence learning and therefore need to be considered in designing the online activity for scaffolded learning.</p>
<p>Cultural: reflective practice ‘Learners reflect on interaction between theory, context and values in their practice’</p>	<p>Schön (1983, 1987)</p>	<p>This places the emphasis on supporting the learner in cyclical planning, acting, evaluating and re-conceptualising an activity or situation. Key elements to be considered are the learners’ theories, values and context as they interact to affect practice. Online reflection helps the learner to make the influence of these explicit in text. Bringing about this deep reflection is challenging online.</p>

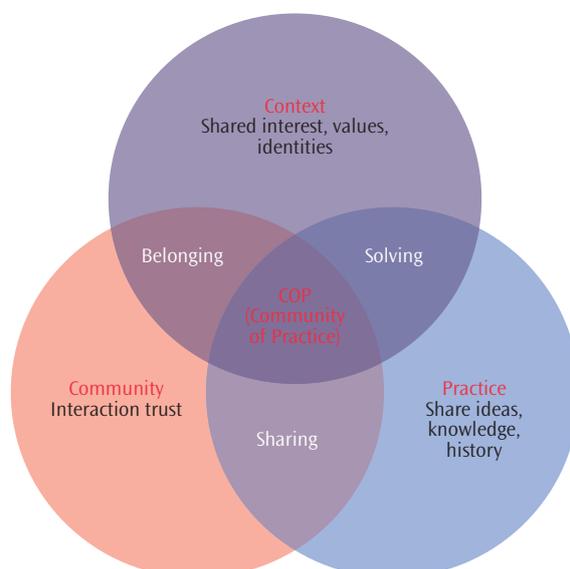
Theory	Key theorists	Online activities
<p>Cultural: situated learning ‘Learning as legitimate peripheral participation in an authentic activity’</p>	<p>Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) Lave and Wenger (1991)</p>	<p>This states that constructive collaborative learning needs to take place in real situations. These activities need to allow reflection, abstraction and generalisation in an instructional dialogue. Transferability of such learning to different situations was seen to be challenging.</p>
<p>Cultural: e-learning communities ‘Learning takes place within a participation framework not in an individual mind’</p>	<p>Wenger (1998)</p>	<p>Online communities are structured for sociability and learning. Knowledge embedded in the members can be shared if there is mutual engagement, joint enterprise, a shared repertoire and negotiation of meaning in practice. The challenge is to stimulate and promote engagement in social practice online. Not enough emphasis is placed on informal learning and there is little recognition that learning occurs both in a participation framework and in an individual participant’s mind.</p>
<p>Cultural: activity theory ‘Learning occurs within and between the activity systems an individual belongs to, involving sense-making and potential for change</p>	<p>Engestrom (1987, 2001)</p>	<p>Meaning arises during collaborative online interactions within and between systems. Tools, roles and rules in the systems influence learning outcomes for individuals and communities. The theory is useful for analysis and can give useful insights about how learning has taken place but may be of less use in suggesting design possibilities at the commissioning stage of a new online activity for learning.</p>

Mayes and de Freitas (2003) state that there are really:

no models of e-learning per se ... only enhancements of models of learning using technology to achieve better learning outcomes, a more effective assessment of these outcomes or a more cost-efficient way of bringing the learning environment to the learners.

In other words, learning online refines existing models of learning – we do not need to create new models to explain it. If we believe that to be true, then we need to be very clear about the underlying assumptions contained in each theory because, in an online environment, we need to be particularly clear about the purpose and design of learning activities.

- The behaviourist perspective of online learning emphasises: task completion and the achievement of sequences of component knowledge and skills. It provides a highly focused set of objectives or learning competences.
- The constructivist perspective emphasises: conceptual development by building understanding of broad principles. The aim is to enable people to understand how to learn and to encourage the development of autonomous learners.
- The cultural perspective looks at the influence of the context of learning. It focuses on creating collaborative learning outcomes and on building relationships between people by, for example, collaborative problem-solving.



Toolkit

The theory

Collaborative learning

find out more

The design implications of the three theoretical strands are:

- The behaviourist view needs clear goals and feedback on achievement in routines of organised activity. It requires individual paths through the routines to be set out, based on the individual's prior performance.
- The constructivist view requires interactive environments for the construction of understanding. Learning activities should encourage supported experimentation and the discovery of broad principles.
- The cultural view needs environments of participation in social practices of enquiry and learning. Support for development of identities as capable and confident learners is needed. Dialogue should facilitate the development of learning relationships and thinking skills.

Most approaches to e-learning will include a mixture of elements that emphasise all these theoretical approaches. Behaviourists' strategies can be used to teach the 'what' (facts), constructivist strategies can be used to teach the 'how' (processes and principles) and cultural strategies can be used to teach the 'why' (higher level thinking that promotes personal meaning and situated and contextual learning).

talk2learn offers many examples of this **mixed approach** in action. A community built along the lines of talk2learn is, we believe, more likely to appeal to the widest range of learners precisely because it encapsulates a variety of approaches to learning.

For further information, references and guidance, go to www.ncsl.org.uk/elearningfacilitationtoolkit

Four Be prepared

10 steps to creating your ideal online community

What do you need to start an e-learning community? How do you sell it to potential users? To help you to start building, this section looks at:

- making the case for your online community
- selecting who to consult
- choosing the learning activities
- piloting the project

Whether or not you are an e-learning enthusiast, the chances are that many others in your organisation will find the concept revolutionary and potentially daunting. Some will be interested but wary, while others may suspect it is an expensive novelty or another case of technology for technology's sake.

To make the development of an online community a success, you need to show that it is none of these things and that it will help your organisation to achieve its ambitions. You need to garner staff support in general and liaise closely with your ICT team in particular at an early stage.

Toolkit

Basic facilitator skills

Community purpose

Learning message

Spell out how e-learning can support your organisation's ambitions.

10 steps to implement an online community

- 10** Evaluation – is it effective?
- 9** Marketing – have a workable plan
- 8** Pilot – have a big picture but start with small pilots
- 7** Facilities – personal requirements of participants
- 6** Managing your learning environment – how will this be done?
- 5** Technical infrastructure – assess IT network and access
- 4** Choosing and developing learning activities
- 3** Learning outcomes – clearly identify the learning need
- 2** Stakeholders – encourage buy-in and commitment
- 1** Set objectives – align e-learning with critical and organisational objectives

1. Set objectives – align e-learning with critical objectives

Match the project to your organisation's objectives so people know what the point of it is. In the medium to long-term, you should be thinking about how e-learning and online community can support all your activities so it becomes part of the **framework** of the organisation.

Consider how the success of an online community will be measured, in particular, learning. Quick wins are important here as it's much easier to get people on board if the advantages are swiftly visible.

Even if you follow the above, be prepared to encounter resistance to the idea of an online community. Some people will already have a **networking system** that has served them well for years — email, online messaging or a chat in the staff room — and will question why they need a new one. Others will be wary of exposing their lack of competence in ICT. Regardless of what the norm has been in terms of communications, resistance to change will underpin many of the challenges you face.

2. Stakeholders – encourage buy-in and commitment

Whip up the support of your ICT and leadership teams. They must be genuinely committed to the project by talking about e-learning, promoting it in briefings and planning sessions and in allowing time for it to take place. Potential e-learning champions (see chapter 6) will also be critical to success, so assess their capabilities and examine what further training they might need (see chapter 5).

3. Learning outcomes – clearly identify the learning need

These online communities are all about providing a much wider opportunity for learners so stress what you expect the results of the project to be and how these will enhance what you already do (see chapter 8). Align to the 'teaching and learning' policy and emphasise that it is the policy not the technology that is driving change.

Toolkit

Blended learning

4. Choosing and developing the learning activities

For your target audience, you need to consider what experience its members already have of e-learning and what preferences they have. What are their learning styles? Are you dealing with multi-cultural audiences? What kind of mentoring and coaching support is needed?

Bear in mind that people are accustomed to a range of learning activities, not just different versions of one type of learning. There are many ways of developing content and activities in an online community so compile a checklist of all the considerations to compare all possible ways forward.

5. Technical infrastructure – assess IT network and access

Liaise with the ICT team (and/or your e-learning specialist team, if one exists) at an early stage. Ensure that the ICT infrastructure can bear your proposals, that the online community software you want to use is supported by your organisation's technology platform (Windows or otherwise) and that there are no clashes with firewalls or other ICT security constraints.

Keep checking your plans with the ICT team so that any technological obstacles are spotted swiftly, and think about what kind of technical support your e-learning project will require once it is up and running (for more on software, see chapter 5).

6. Managing your learning environment – how will this be done?

If you have a managed learning environment (MLE), the look of your new online community should meet the same standards. Think about how far you want the two to integrate. For example, will people be able to use the same user names and passwords? Can you influence the development of the environment through user group meetings?

7. Facilities – personal requirements of participants

Think about where the actual learning activities will take place, as resources should be available all day, every day. The workplace is not always ideal, so should there be a dedicated room or should it be accessible from home? In particular, think about how learners can gain immediate, **just-in-time access**, usually for no more than 10 minutes.

You also need to consider whether the online community will be hosted internally or by a third party and, in either case, who in your organisation will be responsible for managing its use.

In terms of who inputs the data, will it be designated individuals or will anyone be able to load material into the community?

In terms of human resources, think about the requirements for teachers, mentors, tutors and administrators to support your e-learning community along with any child protection related issues.

Make sure help and support is readily available. This may be through online resources, online help, email or telephone support.

8. Pilot – have a big picture but start with small pilots

Choose from:

- a project or training need that people recognise is having high strategic importance and, therefore, attracts good publicity. For example, support for GCSE revision or access to key members of the wider community – maybe a hotseat with the town mayor or a high-profile educational professional in another country
- something low key and of limited strategic value with a lower degree of risk, for example using the community to support meetings such as the school council or extra-curricular groups such as sports teams

Think about the target audience and focus on those people in the organisation who you believe are **open-minded and receptive** to new ways of doing things.

Make sure you present the pilot in a positive light whether it confirms what you are doing is right or highlights where changes are required.

9. Marketing – have a workable plan

Use newsletters, magazines, email, letters and memos from senior managers supporting e-learning to build momentum and create excitement about what you're doing.

10. Evaluation – is it effective?

There's not much point in putting energy into your online community unless you know whether it has worked or not. The evaluation needs to be more than a tick in a box indicating that someone has completed a course online or logged on X number of times. Consider developing a formal evaluation process in which you assess the learning at different points (see chapter 9).

Toolkit

Basic facilitator skills

Monitoring and evaluation

For further information, references and guidance, go to www.ncsl.org.uk/elearningfacilitationtoolkit

Five

Look and feel

Creating a welcoming, inclusive online environment

This chapter looks at:

- what to consider in your choice of software
- designing the site

Choosing the software

Whatever software you choose, you must approach it from a user's perspective rather than that of a software developer or an ICT guru who may have their own, very specific agendas.

The early pioneers of effective networking, collaboration and sharing on the internet were not put off by the awkwardness and unreliability of technology that hampered the early years of web development.

There is still a small minority who relish the mind-boggling challenges that working with technology can present. The majority of us, however, don't want to wrestle with code, endure lengthy waits for downloads or create all-singing, all-dancing animation. We simply want to get on with the job at hand.

The trick is to ensure that your software is easy to use for the latter group and not too boring for the former. To pull off this fine balancing act it's a good idea to **form a steering group** to oversee how the software is chosen, piloted and implemented. They should be enthusiasts and should constantly put themselves into the shoes of each group of users you are hoping to attract. They should always have at the back of their minds this question:

Why would people use this system when they have intuitively networked in other ways for as long as they can remember?

Toolkit

Basic facilitator skills

Community page design and accessibility

Tools - creating activities

Toolkit

User participation

Learning message

Spell out how e-learning can support your organisation's ambitions.

This process needs to continue long after the software has been bought and loaded on to your systems. Doing so at the earliest stages, however, is critical to your future success and will make life easier later on.

If your software is too slow or cumbersome, your users will try it once and then you won't see them for dust. It should be simple, easy and intuitive but you'll also have to use some gentle persuasion and stress the benefits to coax people into embracing it.

It should work alongside the communications systems you already have in place so there is a familiar look to the whole operation. Conferencing software companies, for example, are beginning to marry their packages with Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Messenger so that users can **move seamlessly** between them.

Presenting people with a whole new set of processes (menu commands, shortcuts etc) to learn is another way to turn them off, so make your interface and procedures as close to common web practice as possible.

There should be a wide choice of **software tools** to satisfy the different preferences, learning needs and skills of your users. It is worth including audio and video capability for use in communications and messaging. Consider how to appeal to people who find large slabs of text off-putting or who are not competent typists and wordsmiths. (Given that so much ICT-based work now depends on keyboard skills, it is worth thinking about providing everyone with a way to improve their touch-typing skills online.)

You must also consider the **scale** of the enterprise. Just how many potential users will there be?

And don't forget that buying your system is only the beginning. Besides the initial costs, there is the cost of ownership to consider and, at some stage, you might want to look into the possibilities of purchasing with other schools or organisations. Other cost issues to look at include annual licences, support and maintenance as well as training.

Designing the online community

You will want to:

- keep participants uppermost in mind
- make the most important content immediately visible on the home page
- make links to other pages or external sites prominent
- limit use of colour
- use easy-to-read fonts
- use images sparingly
- bear in mind that users' knowledge of technology may be less sophisticated than yours and that their systems may be slower
- consider users with special needs

Toolkit

Basic facilitator skills

Community page design
and accessibility

NCSL design guide

Online community pages should be designed to create a **welcoming, inclusive and pleasing environment** where users can find what they need simply and quickly. It's important to think about the visitors to a community and to predict what they need. Answers to these questions should form the basis for all design decisions.

The most important page within a community is the front or **home page** where items should be arranged in a logical manner. Generally speaking, the upper left-hand quadrant of a page is the hot zone, where the most important identification and navigation information should appear. For example will your online environment allow for messages from mobile devices - consider who can access the system and when.

After the hot zone, the rest of the visible area of the content (ie what you can see on the full screen without scrolling down) is the place where the most important and up-to-date items should be. New forums, major meeting points (such as community bulletin boards), introductory information, announcements and navigation links are the sort of items that should be immediately visible when the front page is called up by users and Microsoft themselves have introduced conferencing software as part of their new Vista windows system.

The bottom of a long page will be seen only by people willing to make the effort to scroll around. Keep this in mind and place items further down the page in accordance with their importance, while avoiding the need to scroll sideways as much as possible.

On talk2learn pages, we publish items by inserting them into template boxes called containers so there's a certain amount of **uniformity** built into the system. We have control over what goes into these page panels, whether there's a border around them, how many forum contributions appear and how many panels go on the page.

Overall, the main thing is to get the right balance between white space and content. Make sure information is well-organised in logical and succinct chunks on the page and offer clear headers and signposting. Short sentences, short paragraphs, white space and bulleted lists also assist with the difficult task of reading on-screen.

Links to other pages in the community or site or to external websites should always be labelled clearly. Put the name of the page, website, file or item in the link itself rather than 'Click here'. Links should be prominent, so avoid burying a one-word link in a long paragraph of text.

When you are linking to an external site that will not have a link back to your own site, use a **separate window**. Similarly, when you want your users to be able to open another resource such as a think piece or a hotseat-type forum without having to move away from that item, use another window. But don't go window-crazy since too many open windows can be confusing to the user.

Use a limited number of **colours** and vary them only to draw attention to important items and navigational links. Be sensitive to colour-blind users and don't make colour the only distinguishing factor for anything essential to the user. Black or dark-coloured text on a white or light background is the norm but you can invert this rule for logos and banners. Use easy-to-read **fonts** such as Arial and Verdana and never mix fonts within a single text box or paragraph.

Remember that **images** can take time to load, so don't over-burden your page with them. They may look pretty but waiting for them to appear can try the user's patience so use them only when they add real value to the page, and keep them small. Remember you can compress image files to reduce the amount of time they take to load but you need to strike a balance between image quality and file size (bigger files mean better quality).

Improve poor photographs but avoid distracting animations.

Don't forget that text and images on websites are subject to **copyright**. Ideally, choose images that are labelled as free to use or get permission from the copyright-holder. You can, of course, create your own with a digital camera and imaging software.

There are other technical considerations to bear in mind. Not everyone will have the same technology as you, for example. Visitors using slower internet connections will have to wait a long time for images and files to load, so try to get the same information or ideas across in a modest way before resorting to hi-tech solutions.

Visitors with smaller, older monitors might need to scroll sideways to see a whole page which is **disorienting** for them. On talk2learn, we found it best to minimise the need for scrolling by placing no more than two activities side-by-side on a community page.

Remember that some visitors may have special needs. Sight-impaired users read web pages with large font, magnifying screens, Braille or speech-based browsers. The recommendations for fonts above will also help these users. Blind users require text-based alternatives for pictures and other graphic elements. Otherwise, all visible content is lost to them, including buttons and other image-based navigational links.

talk2learn was designed with accessibility issues in mind, allowing the use of screen readers to interpret the content of a page. The Disability Discrimination Act/Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (DDA/SENDA) Part 4 sets out **guidelines on access** and there are other design specifics that aid accessibility (please see references and resources below).

To conform to internet safety standards, images of children used on the internet must be from a distance, in groups, from behind or with facial features otherwise obscured.

Toolkit

Basic facilitator skills

For further information, references and guidance, go to www.ncsl.org.uk/elearningfacilitationtoolkit

Six

Leading roles

The importance of facilitators and champions

This chapter looks at:

- the role of the facilitator and facilitation teams, the essential skills and management
- transferring classroom skills online
- the importance of weaving and summarising
- NCSL's online facilitation course
- the role of community champions

Facilitation is probably the pivotal factor in the success of NCSL's online communities. At its best, it enables individuals to get the most from their membership and helps communities to thrive beyond the initial burst of enthusiasm.

Research by Bristol University into talk2learn, NCSL's online learning communities, found that:

Where facilitation is withdrawn or inconsistent, community activity often decreases. Where it is pro-active, consistent and visible, communities tend to flourish provided purpose and expectations are clear and understood by the participants.

Toolkit

Facilitator presence

Responding to contributions

Learning message

People matter most: skilled facilitation is crucial.

The role of the facilitator

The facilitator role can be taken by different people according to the context. In a locally based network of professional colleagues, for example, one of the members can be a successful **champion** of the community, guiding the group towards shared objectives and providing the glue that holds it together.

In a community attached to one of NCSL's leadership programmes, a tutor or facilitator can take on a role ensuring commitments are met, while another provides support and encouragement.

The pivotal role of e-learning facilitators and specialists encourages, supports and enables groups such as school leaders to **share their learning** while maintaining a friendly environment in which members feel comfortable about participating in discussion, sharing information and publishing their own items. The facilitator also provides technical support backed up, in the case of talk2learn, by a dedicated phone helpline.

A document defining roles for individual facilitators is vital. Allotting specific tasks to individuals exploits their expertise and experience, encourages professional development and increases knowledge, skills and a sense of belonging within the team.

Facilitators need to be able to draw on a range of **skills**:

- design of community architecture and structure
- facilitation and intervention in community activities
- creation of summaries of discussions and archiving of resources
- face-to-face training in the use of your chosen software and online training for new facilitators
- promotion of online community processes, philosophy and effective use, especially in support of the organisation's learning objectives
- advice and project management

There may also be a **research** dimension to the role, covering:

- investigation of effective online communities and their facilitation
- collection and analysis of data – quantitative and qualitative – to highlight the impact of the community
- planning initiatives and pilots
- writing research feedback and action research reports
- implementation of research findings into planning initiatives and pilots

The question of the facilitators contributing their **own opinions** to online discussions arose in talk2learn. Our own practice is that as a general rule facilitators shouldn't express their personal opinion: the facilitator's main role is to shepherd discussions, playing an essential role in linking ideas, summarising and providing information where appropriate, while aiming to remain neutral throughout. It is important to consider the difference between reading and facilitating an online activity.

Toolkit

Facilitator contributions

Toolkit

Blended learning

The online facilitator e-learning specialist team at NCSL also collaborates to provide advice and consultation on the development of talk2learn and on the development of e-learning tools in the Learning Gateway, the portal to all NCSL's online learning facilities.

They have also developed online and face-to-face learning materials, an online facilitation and tutoring skills course, an online mentoring course and an online, community-based set of learning resources. Happily this practice is easily transferable to schools and other organisations encouraging facilitators to contribute to the further development of tools.

Depending on the scale of your e-learning communities, you may need a team dedicated to **managing the facilitators and the infrastructure**. The size of NCSL's team – there are nine e-learning specialists – means we do. This team manages day-to-day activity, oversees consistency, ensures good practice is shared and channels information between the e-learning specialists and other areas of NCSL activity to keep everyone up to speed on the latest developments.

Bringing classroom skills online

There's a perception that face-to-face and online learning and teaching are very different experiences. Because the two learning spaces look and feel dissimilar, even highly experienced teachers tend to assume that they need completely new skills to operate in the virtual world. Not knowing where to start, many simply stick to their comfort zone.

In fact, face-to-face and online learning have more in common than you might think. Most importantly, high-level teaching skills are definitely **transferable** between the two. Teachers who are becoming facilitators need to overcome these perceived barriers to online learning. This can be achieved by concentrating on the positive development of the skills members already possess.

The main reasons people say they struggle when working online are:

- the lack of familiar social cues
- too much time required to log on and participate
- technical difficulties with the hardware wastes even more time

By thinking about online communities in a different way, these obstacles can actually be repackaged as **advantages**. The benefits in both face-to-face and online learning environments are shown in the table below.

Characteristics	Face-to-face	Online
Social cues	Facial expression Body language	Detail in written word, images and smileys (emoticons)
Time	Limited to the regulations of the institution	Anytime anyplace
Hardware	Technical help needs to be always available	Technical help needs to be always available
Visible facilitation	Always there	Planned and appropriate regular contact with participants

Learning online has further advantages:

- the chance to reflect before responding or questioning
- the learning space is designed to fit with your schedule
- learning and teaching are visible and easily shared with others
- responses are written and, like images, are more permanent

All the things teachers and facilitators do face-to-face can be replicated online. Sometimes particular skills manifest themselves in different ways but courtesies and organisation are appropriate in both spaces.

This table describes how familiar face-to-face processes might be developed when working online. They are also the core skills for community facilitators and champions.

Process	Face-to-face	Online
Meeting and greeting	Getting to know your students and putting them at their ease	Provision of interactive tool where all participants are greeted and acknowledged
Social interaction	Allowing space for coffee-time chat	Ensuring that social opportunities are available and appropriately encouraged in all communities
Planning	Clear learning objectives that are shared	There should be learning aims and objectives for the online experience. These may be long-term, and they should be shared.
Differentiation	Prior knowledge should be established. Activities should be varied	Prior knowledge should be established. Online activities should be varied
Learning and teaching dialogue	Conversations, facilitated discussions and presentations leading to debate	Variety of facilitated forums that promote dialogue, possibly with links to other materials
Supportive	Appropriate comments from facilitators, tutors etc	Appropriate contributions from facilitators, tutors etc
Developmental	Appropriate challenge and extension in comments etc	Appropriate challenge and extension in activities, contributions etc
Collaborative learning	Effective summarising and producing finished product	Evidence by outcome – summaries, weaves, finished product
Higher order questioning skills	Evidence of appropriate language in questions asked	Evidence of appropriate language in activities and contributions

Weaving and summarising

One important role of the online facilitator (just as when facilitating learning face to face) is to draw together threads of dialogue in order to summarise and highlight key points for the group and other interested parties outside the community.

This skill of weaving and summarising online texts is something that needs to be learned over time through practice. Different facilitators may tackle it in different ways.

Toolkit

Facilitator contributions

Contributions -
being effective

Threading and weaving



Weaving part way through online dialogue

At NCSL we use the term **'weaving'** to describe the process of drawing together the threads of online discussions part way through. It can help members enormously as it avoids them having to read through all contributions to get the flavour of the discussion.

There is no one set method of doing it because no two discussions are alike but weaving may have the following characteristics:

- based on typed text (rather than tables, mind maps or other representations)
- short and quick to read
- mentioning some, if not all, participants by name
- ending with a question to move learning forward further

Summarising at the end of online dialogue

Once the activity has closed, the facilitator should **summarise** the discussion to draw it to a close and provide easy reference back to the key points. We recommend that the summary remains within the community where it was created. Specific quotes from participants may be highlighted or used in the summary. Tables, mind maps and images may be included.

Confidentiality

Often, discussions that have taken place within a private talk2learn community may be of interest to others. At NCSL, summaries of a number of important hotseat sessions have been made and published on the main public web pages.

Respecting and maintaining the **confidentiality** of participants must be a top priority when presenting summaries to a wider public. A summary published outside the online community may have a very different feel and comprise:

- a combination of text, tables and bullet points, slightly longer to read
- well laid-out pages, useful to keep and refer back to in school
- very few, if any, quotes from participants, which are used **only with their permission**
- a very clear overview of the whole dialogue, encouraging others to bring their own expertise to future online discussions
- presentation of summaries in multimedia forms through use of pdf's, podcasting and video.



By creating summaries and making them available to a worldwide audience, NCSL:

- recognises the importance and quality of new knowledge generated from collaborative discussion
- contributes to the **resource base** on leadership
- enables those outside talk2learn to learn from community dialogue
- demonstrates the depth and breadth of community activities
- celebrates the best of online community learning in the public arena

OFAT: the course for facilitators

NCSL's Online Facilitation and Tutoring (OFAT) course has been addressing the development of the skills required for effective online learning for the past three years. Participants have praised its coverage of both the theory and practice of online learning, its stimulating content and the way it delineates each stage of successful online learning.

Toolkit

Basic facilitator skills

Training and development

“This course has made me think about areas I had not bothered about much before, such as ‘lurkers’ – what to do about them and what to call them – and also revitalised issues to do with learning styles.”

“I considered myself to be a bit of a dinosaur where computers are concerned but I am rapidly revising this view in the light of what I have done, read and contributed through being involved in the OFAT course. I feel much more confident to lead others online and have learned lots about good practice, the theory behind it and coping skills.”

“It has provided a great springboard from which to develop my learning and online facilitation skills. I have become much more disciplined at participating online.”

OFAT has **four modules**:

- Unit 1 Online/Offline: Understanding the process
- Unit 2 The role of the facilitator: encouraging participation
- Unit 3 Learning online - an individual journey
- Unit 4 Learning online - learning together

The course begins by looking at models of teaching and learning online, in particular Gilly Salmon’s five-step model (Salmon, 2000 – for details see Theory section of facilitator toolkit). The first module explores how online participants need to develop **basic skills and confidence** before moving to stages of information exchange, knowledge construction and development. Discussion is encouraged through the use of talk2learn’s forum tools.

- Further information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/OFAT

Stages in growing and nurturing an online community

The theory

Stages of Community Development	What members might be saying	What tools could you use?
Development	<i>"I'd like to see if we can set up a group to look at succession planning in schools, is anyone interested?"</i>	User initiated collaborative activities. Tools used in conjunction with each other. Taking on leadership across the educational setting you are working in.
Knowledge co-construction	<i>"Responding to Mary and John ... you both identify gender issues in your comments and I think..."</i>	Vote Brainstorm Conversation Hotseat Debate Editable documents for shared construction Personal messages Survey
Sharing information	<i>"Does anyone have a policy on gifted and talented pupils"</i>	Vote Brainstorm Conversation Personal messages Simple votes and surveys
Online socialization	<i>"Hello everyone – Happy New Year – have a great 2007"</i>	Votes and surveys Brainstorm Personal messages
Access and motivation	<i>Easy joining instructions Good reason for going online presented</i>	

Use tools in a simple way to start with. A vote or brainstorm requires little confidence, move into tools where users are named for example conversations or debates.

As you develop the activities more sophisticated tools can be used on their own and together to construct more complex multi-stage activities.

Facilitators use personal messages to support individuals and groups to engage in community

Salmon, G. (2004) *E-moderating, the key to teaching and learning online*, 2nd Edition, Taylor and Francis, London

The second module develops an understanding of the issues and approaches of online learning. Through discussion, participants begin to understand how learners can work with their tutors and their colleagues to build their common knowledge. Again, the appropriate tools in talk2learn enhance this experience and help to build users' confidence.

The third module focuses on key principles of engaging people online, different learning styles and how to encourage participation. Participants also take part in an online chat as a way of bringing in the reluctant contributor.

The last module looks at how to deal with potentially difficult situations online.

The role of champions

Colleagues who can promote and sustain the benefits of online learning are worth their weight in gold. The organisation's online community facilitator can support these 'e-vangelists' or champions in establishing online communities and reviewing their progress. Research shows that a core of around five such champions is needed to make a community successful and sustainable.

Online community champions must have a firm idea of what they can 'bring to the party' to make the community vibrant and self-sustaining. They will also need:

- time on a regular basis to develop their personal skills in the software used and their facilitation skills such as how to develop engagement
- a set of supporting tools and a specific online community to discuss with other champions learning experiences and needs

Toolkit

Facilitator presence

Facilitator competencies

The role of the champion will vary according to the nature of the support needed and the context of the organisation. The recommendation is that the role, expectations and support be clarified during discussions with the online facilitator to cover the following points.

- What is a reasonable time you can give to the role and for how long?
- What sort of **induction process** do you need?
- What sort of regular contact will you establish with other champions to help them actively engage in the community?
- What ongoing support package do you need to help you succeed in your role?

Champions should have a welcoming personal page or space with a photo attached to give the online presence a **personal touch**. Community members should be encouraged to do likewise. Champions should also contact members regularly if they are not contributing to ensure there are no technical or other problems. Members should be made aware if champions are to be absent for any length of time.

Champions should start new conversations and pick up on side issues, evaluate all activities and, should participation levels drop, close the item and **provide feedback** to groups or individuals. They should also build trust and have fun while taking care with the use of humour and irony.

It is, of course, possible for a local or theme-based online learning community to be established and for the members never to meet face to face. However, it's fair to say that the most successful communities meet regularly. Led by the champions, they discuss and agree the purpose and **goals** of the online community and set dates for reviews and software training.

Toolkit

Facilitator presence

At review sessions, decisions should also be taken on who are potential new champions and how much time they can give to:

- helping to sustain the community
- supporting the training of others in use of the community tools
- maintaining activities such as a community bulletin board
- sustaining a clear timetable of events and tasks
- suggesting, creating and running forums on topics agreed by the group
- closing and summarising items as appropriate
- maintaining agendas and minutes of meetings

Finally

In conclusion, the so-called barriers to online learning are self-imposed by facilitators and participants – it's a question of **perception**. Rather than concentrating on the few obstacles, facilitators and participants should think about the high number of transferable skills they have and how these could be developed in new and creative ways.

For further information, references and guidance, go to www.ncsl.org.uk/communities.

Seven Rules of engagement

Encouraging people to join in

This chapter looks at practical ways of fostering participation in your online community. It covers:

- the difference between engagement and participation
- the importance of a single purpose
- the value of collaboration
- general tips on fostering engagement
- setting up a hotseat

Engagement, participation and deeper learning

Engagement and participation are different animals. Users engage with a search engine such as Google but they participate when they are actively encouraged to contribute to a web-based project, such as Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia, or the BBC's Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy site, h2g2.

Engagement is the connection of the online community with the largest number of participants possible. Participation is a two-way process that, in its most sublime form, enables users to express themselves.

Online communities, such as those that make up NCSL's talk2learn, take that process a step further. They actively foster a particular kind of **interaction** that deepens learning and creates understanding. **Hotseats or peer-to-peer** learning, in which participants both question and debate with experts as well as share their own experiences, are good examples of this deeper learning experience.

Toolkit

User participation

Learning messages

Participation enables users to express themselves.

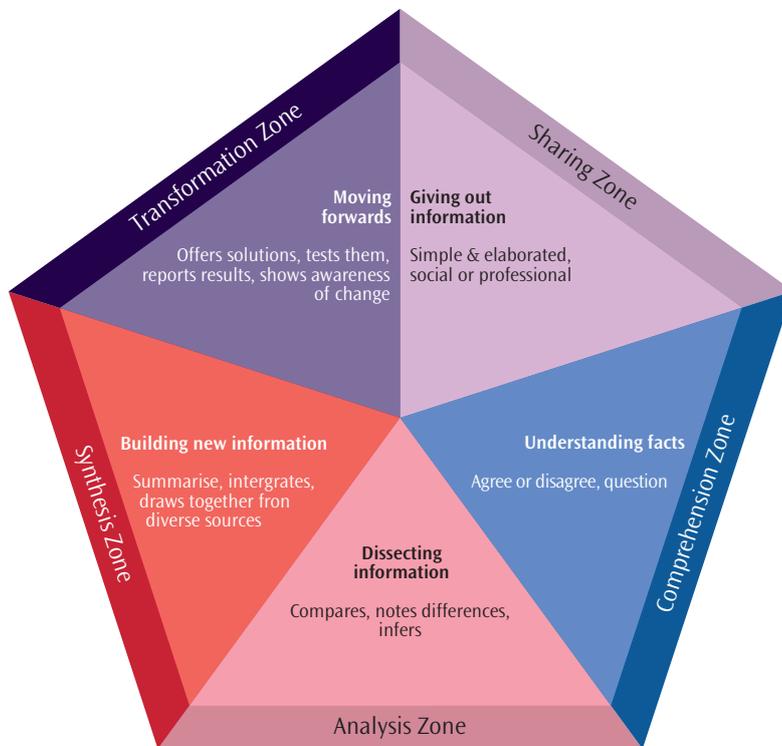
Collaboration is the key to unravelling complexity.

A clear purpose

There is no single path to community engagement. Look, for example, at the diversity of talk2learn's communities. They range from 105,000 members to just 10, and participation rates are equally varied. Some are portals for access to information while others, such as Policy in action, are there for consultation.

A number are led by course tutors and act as repositories for people's learning. Some, such as the mentoring communities attached to a specific activity, have a short lifespan but contribute greatly to people's learning. In some cases, online interaction has replaced face-to-face, email or telephone contact altogether to become the main method of communication for their members – **true community learning**.

Such a broad range of audiences requires a broad range of strategies but the key factor, and one common to all of the successful communities, is a clear and defined purpose. Without a strong, agreed rationale that participants embrace, communities will struggle to engage people and their content will be diluted.



Sharing Zone

How can I encourage participants to offer personal information - to create an atmosphere for sharing, and professional knowledge to enrich the dialogue?

“Mark - sounds like a great holiday! Could you tell me more about how you have organised your department?”

Comprehension Zone

How can I model making comments that agree or disagree with contributions (with reasons for this) and asking for more information towards understanding?

“I agree Claire because this is a key element in improving learning. Was this common practice?”

Analysis Zone

How can I model pulling out common threads from contributions and presenting them in the debate, and also pointing out differences between contributions?

“The answer to the problems you both describe has to be collaboration - though your contexts are very different”

Synthesis Zone

How can I model summarising a group of contributions? How can I encourage participants to bring information (links) from outside this debate to enrich it?

“A number of participants have highlighted the issue of .. there are useful resources at www.website.com”

Transformation Zone

How can I encourage participants to think of how this information might lead to action, state this in the debate and report on any results? How can I model commenting on learning (or change) that has come through this online interaction?

“Have others tried a virtual debate about good practice and elearning. John's description has moved my thinking forward”

SEDDON-NCSL: Model of online learning behaviours

A climate of collaboration

Collaboration, rather than competition, between schools is increasingly seen as the way forward for education. Forward-thinking heads understand that they need to start to pool both their physical and mental talents at local level.

This collaboration and networking has been christened **'gift culture'** for its emphasis on sharing and exchanging knowledge and expertise. It is equally powerful in online environments and NCSL continues to invest in this area through the work of its Leadership Network.

Online collaboration in these communities has enabled leaders to share their resources, advice and skills with those who seek them and provided a pool of both experience and insight beyond which no one leader or even group of leaders could hope to gather in a lifetime.

Highlighting the **power of collaboration** is a key selling point for your online community and crucial to developing leaders' interest in its possibilities.

Practical tips for building participation

The secret of success for an online community is to encourage users to:

- acknowledge what they have gained as an audience
- donate learning of their own

Our experience in talk2learn suggests the following practical tips.

- Persuade members to agree to check online every day or at least several times a week. As a reminder, suggest they set the front page of your community as their home page.
- Place all **working documents** on the site, such as forms, funding or bid documents or guidance and calendars, in fact all the things that people need to access for their work.
- Email reminders to people and keep repeating instructions for accessing your community.
- Use **newsletters** to whet appetites about forthcoming forums and other events and direct them to the website for more details.
- Make sure the community facilitators and champions mention the site at all meetings, perhaps by providing a short and enthusiastic report on what's new.
- Give **postcards** to key people with their user names on and the password help desk.
- Try a conversation or debate that is unthreatening. Some people may feel intimidated by educational debate but may be happy to say what they are reading.
- Hold a competition, for best photograph, for example.
- Ask those who lead on certain subjects to run question and answer items on the site relating to their area.
- Approach as wide an audience as possible to contribute and create articles.

What happens in talk2learn?

The table on the following page shows some ways in which talk2learn stimulates participation and the outcomes.

Activity	Community tools	Outcomes
Ask and answer questions	Forums, chat and help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve member knowledge • Personalise learning opportunities
Discuss	Forums (debate, conversation, discussion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and challenge ideas • Grow understanding
Ask experts	Hotseat forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand, refresh and personalise content
Collaboration	Shared documents and resources, live chat, forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow community knowledge and resources • Action research
Share or take resources	File stores, (lists, documents, website addresses), community pages. Secure membership or content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of resources • Time-saving • Secure information store
Validation and visibility	Members' list, member pages, personal icons, lists of people who have read forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved sense of value
Delicate or sensitive discussions	Brainstorm (anonymous). Secure membership and content, closed communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom to discuss difficult or sensitive issues
Communication	Notes, news, instant messenger, email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push information • Update content
Reflection	Community visit, journey over time in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen understanding • Learning

Running a hotseat

As regular users of talk2learn will know, a hotseat is a virtual discussion area where a guest expert and online participants can debate vital issues through the posting of questions and answers. This has potential in a school environment, enabling access to a wide range of experts to support student and staff learning.

Hotseat guests in talk2learn have included education ministers, senior members of DfES, educationalists, researchers and all types of school and business leaders.

Each guest is asked to provide a short **think piece**, a 250-word stimulus to the discussion that needs to provide background information, along with three open-ended questions designed to stimulate discussion. Increasingly NCSL is also using videos and audio to present the think piece. A biography and photograph of the guest is usually put on their home page.

A short introductory paragraph for the hotseat, a biography and photograph of the host, the three stimulus questions and links to the think piece are inserted into the header of the hotseat forum. This is the part seen when the forum is placed on a page to encourage the user to take part.

It is important to publicise the hotseat forum so that initial contributions can be made quickly. One problem is often the reluctance to be the first to ask a question, but once the ice is broken, the questions flow freely. talk2learn allows a hotseat guest to respond to questions at a time best suited to them. We have had guests contributing from Australia, Canada and the USA although the majority of posts come from school leaders in England.

Toolkit

Introduction

resources

Facilitator competencies

The **tone of the response** to a question is important. Showing that a contribution is valued and also mentioning the contributor by name creates a good atmosphere. Similarly, a guest asking a supplementary question as part of a response is a positive way of re-engaging with a contributor.

It is important that hotseat guests should try to visit regularly. If possible, a response to a question should be made within 48 hours. Should this prove impossible, a holding statement can be placed by the guest or an e-learning facilitator, allowing other contributions to continue.

At the end of the hotseat's allocated time, it will usually be **archived** within the online community that established it, along with a short, introductory summary.

It is important to remember that the people who contribute to a hotseat are not the only ones who benefit. There are many people who, while not actively contributing, learn greatly from what they read. And the hotseat guest may gain just as much from the discussion as those who ask a question or raise an issue.

Underpinning the success of hotseat is the role of the facilitators. The facilitator works to support the hotseat guest, and those participating in the activity. At the end of the hotseat, a facilitator will typically write a summary, send thank you notes to participants and evaluate the impact of the hotseat.

For further information, references and guidance, go to www.ncsl.org.uk/communities.

Blended learning in action – what works and what doesn't

This chapter looks at how online learning communities can be used to support continuing professional development (CPD) programmes or other activities as part of a blended learning package.

Blended learning enables an individual to choose to learn at different times and in different environments, for example, face to face or online, individually or in groups. It covers NCSL's:

- Bursar Development Programme (the certificate and diploma of school business management)
- Strategic Leadership of ICT (SLICT)
- Foundation Stage leaders – building a new community

We also reflect on the role online learning communities play in fostering international links.

Bursar Development Programme (BDP)

The concept of **blended learning** was built into the BDP from its inception in 2003 and its activities cover the full range of learning styles – residential, collaboration through discussion and debate online, reading, research and project work. As such, it combines the systematic acquisition of knowledge with support to enable candidates to explore and develop their own administrative and management skills and, therefore, raise the quality of their schools.

As they often work around computers most of the day, we have found that school business managers naturally take to the online community as a part of their professional life.

Learning message

Different combinations suit different contexts.

talk2learn plays a central role in the programme. Participants are assigned to their own **unique community**, Bursars Count, where they discuss and collaborate on issues usually based around the module topics (financial management, environmental management etc).

By the end of the course, participants need to understand the political, economic, social, legal and technological environments within which educational institutions operate and be able to manage resources and school administration.

These issues can be facilitated within the online community but, as with learning face to face, people need support and everyone needs the opportunity to make a contribution.

The programme is regularly evaluated and the core materials are reviewed and updated. The online environment and its **pedagogy** are rethought and updated as technology changes and participants give regular feedback to help the programme to develop.

Lessons learned

We have made some **changes** as the gaps between theory and practice have emerged.

Once the programme has finished, BDP graduates join other school leaders in other online communities and work with tutors to support new candidates coming into talk2learn. These graduates have also helped NCSL to develop talk2learn's online mentoring training and facilitation courses.

In feedback, participants describe the personal as well as professional benefits of working with the online community. For some, talk2learn has become their default source of support.

“The sense of **isolation** you can get working in a school office has been removed because help and support is only a computer screen away. I have shared information about finance policy and gift aid with colleagues all over the country and knowledge gleaned from the talk2learn site is incorporated into various school policies that I have written.”

“If any issues arise, I automatically visit talk2learn. I have passed on web links to coordinators in school, picked up ideas about fundraising and looked at best practice in many areas. I never say ‘I don’t know’, but, more to the point, ‘I will get back to you’. A quick surf on talk2learn and information, links and expert advice is available on most educational areas. The main advantage is that you keep yourself up to date on **current policy and practice** and have a better overview of any issue.”

SLICT

SLICT is NCSL’s strategic ICT leadership programme. Originally for headteachers only, there is now also a team-based programme. The online community plays a key role in supporting both.

As part of the blended learning experience, participants attend a **three-day residential course**. Prior to this, heads are directed to the online community where they introduce themselves and start to talk about where their school is and what they expect to gain from SLICT. These issues and reflections are recorded and discussed throughout the event.

A varied programme of online activities is offered and members can also access the main SLICT community where previous and current participants can talk with their colleagues.

But it has not all been plain sailing, and this is where some of the issues around facilitation and engagement discussed in other chapters come to the fore.

Lessons learned

Feedback suggests that 90 per cent of headteachers visit the online community prior to the residential event and get to know their colleagues there. But engagement really dropped off, sometimes quite alarmingly, afterwards. A hiatus should be expected as heads return to their school and are immediately thrust into fighting the fires that have been sparked by their three-day absence. However, this doesn't explain why many communities simply wither and die while a smaller number thrive with heads really exploring issues and learning together.

What it has underlined to us at NCSL is that the 'if we build it, they will come' attitude doesn't work. This is not how online communities grow and this does not take into account a **natural nervousness** experienced by some people when working and collaborating online.

Small communities work well when all members are actively involved and buy into it but this cannot be expected from a group of school leaders thrown together by the happenstance of attending the same event. Lessons have been learned from this and changes have been made to the SLICT programme, but it is an issue to bear in mind if you are considering setting up your own community with a potentially large and disparate membership.

Key questions we asked ourselves were as follows.

- Each community has its own **unique feel and atmosphere** in the beginning. How do we sustain this?
- How do we facilitate learning for headteachers effectively after the event?
- How do we get those providing the programme to buy in to online communities?

The blended learning experience now offered by SLICT is as follows.

- There is an invitation into a cohort online community by those providing the course to **practise** the online techniques required to collaborate online.
- The community is exploited fully at the face-to-face event.
- Post-event, participants can join national discussions facilitated by those providing the course according to a strict and clear timetable of events. There will also be **success stories** associated with logging on to the community, for example a monthly ICT update on the front page.
- Participants can also access further content and video case studies by linking with the Learning Gateway, NCSL's virtual learning environment.

Building a new community: Foundation Stage leaders' community

NCSL's experiences in establishing a community for leaders who work in state nurseries, playgroups, integrated children's centres and other early years settings highlight some of the issues that arise in the launch of any brand new online group.

Research shows that ICT issues tend to **loom larger** for Foundation Stage leaders. Some, such as those who work in pre-school settings with the under-fives, tend to be less confident than others in the beginning. Foundation Stage leaders are less likely to have access to computers with internet access at work and so their use of technology may not be as confident as other users.

It's not a disadvantage that necessarily persists. In our experience, people get up to speed quickly with technology and are as adept as staff in other phases. There's a **universal lesson** here: don't assume that unfamiliarity with technology indicates inability or lack of interest.

We held a number of online sessions to help our group get to know each other and then organised an introductory (face-to-face) event for around 20 leaders. Here, we demonstrated the benefits of, and the differences between, face-to-face and online learning and involved the leaders in discussions about how they might use the community.

They also had the chance to **familiarise** themselves with the technology. A training page allowed them to play around with the tools and to discuss non-educational topics – ‘Tell us something no one would guess about you’, for example – as a means of building connections between people in a light-hearted way.

Having this opportunity to meet, discuss and throw around ideas was a major factor in getting the community up and running. It was intended to make people feel confident about accessing and contributing to the community. The emphasis throughout was on practicality: we made sure people felt comfortable at every stage and we took them through the process step by step.

Accessibility, ownership and content were key issues. The facilitators felt very strongly that users should, as far as possible, take ownership of the community from the start. There was an outlined agenda for the two days which listed facilitators’ ideas on content, but it was flexible enough to respond to issues the group raised. In small groups, the leaders discussed various ideas, including the look of the community, for which they discussed various metaphors.

In the end, the most popular metaphor choice turned out to be a Foundation Stage setting with icons indicating ‘creativity’, ‘reading’ or ‘staff room’, for example. The choice of **iconography** was, however, less important than the fact that the group themselves had chosen it. It was another way of giving them a sense of ownership.

Similarly, in discussions on the first day, we asked participants what the burning issues were for them as leaders and recorded their thoughts on flip charts. Later we drew on these ideas, using people’s own words and phrases to start online discussions on specific topics.

Immediately after the face-to-face event, 20 Foundation Stage leaders began using the new community and we have had some highly positive feedback about both the face-to-face event and the community development from the beginning. We had more than 2,000 visits in the first few months and there are now around 130 members.

The most popular areas are the **introductory section** where leaders can just say hello, talk about their setting or ask a question. A featured school page which was set up to show the organisation of a school and how its unit works, with a chance to ask questions, has also proved popular.

Lessons learned

This particular community was launched after an earlier version for Foundation Stage leaders failed to get off the ground. The key reason for its failure, we subsequently realised, was a lack of access for anyone but primary school heads, rather than being targeted at Foundation Stage leaders. Many primary heads have little early years experience and often **delegate** that leadership responsibility to other staff, so would be unlikely to take up an invitation to join a Foundation Stage community. The lesson here is: know your target market.

International activities

One of the great things about online communities is that they transcend barriers of time and geography. Members can live virtually anywhere, united by a common purpose or interest, rather than a postcode or timetable.

talk2learn's Global Community was established as an arena for school leaders from around the world to discuss any aspect of leadership. A large number of schools in England have used it to establish active links with others overseas.

It runs online conferences, concentrating on leadership issues in particular countries with **local hotseat guests**. There are also more general discussions where perspectives from the country can be shared with colleagues elsewhere.

NCSL receives a stream of overseas visitors wanting to evaluate how a national college for school leadership could operate in their own countries or how their existing CPD could be improved. The Global Community allows these visitors to continue the engagement and connections they have made with NCSL after they have returned home.

The **International Placements for Headteachers (IPH)** programme, which NCSL runs with the British Council, has its own online community, a key part of which is the placement group pages that come into effect when groups of headteachers, led by a facilitator, visit an overseas country.

The group is provided with a specific placement country page in the IPH community, set up to allow the group members to network, share information and support each other prior to the study visit. They can also keep in contact and collaborate on the report to share their views and experiences after the placement.

Here's a sample of the feedback we have had from the communities.

“ I work as an educational consultant for the Supreme Education Council in the State of Qatar. Qatar is currently embracing major educational reform. I think global sharing of ideas is extremely useful.”

“ I wasn't aware of this wonderful global interaction until just now – what a powerful, influential learning platform for us. I am a Principal of a 550-pupil school just north of Auckland, New Zealand.”

“ I am a headteacher of a large multi-cultural school in Doncaster and we have been very lucky to have been involved in visits to the Caribbean, Hungary, Botswana and, more recently, I went to Taipei. All were life-changing visits and have had huge impact on our school in terms of the curriculum and the excellent CPD it has offered staff. We have an international co-ordinator in school who has formed a network with other schools in the area to promote internationalism.”

For further information, references and guidance, go to www.ncsl.org.uk/communities

Nine

Made to measure

Evaluating the impact of your community

Successful online communities generate a buzz that comes from visitors and contributors alike. This chapter explores some of the ways we have tried to measure this interest and impact. It looks at:

- who needs data and why
- different ways of measuring community activity
- meaningful versus meaningless data

Communities such as NCSL's talk2learn offer school leaders a wonderful opportunity for communication and collaboration but to know whether that potential translates into learning, we need to collect **data** and share it with all the community stakeholders.

Different people need different information for different reasons. At the community level, for example, facilitators of learning need to know what impact the items being created are having and what's happening in schools as a result of the issues raised. Middle managers need data for quality assurance and, as they are accountable to senior management, will rely on data as evidence of activity. Senior managers, meanwhile, need a **broad picture** of activity so they can see whether their investment is paying dividends.

The aim of collecting and disseminating information is to increase the learning that takes place within the community by continually reviewing and improving its content and structure.

Learning messages

Measuring activity depends on more than a head-count.

Quantitative data counts – so does qualitative.

What to measure?

In an ideal world, we could quantify the level of buzz in a community by examining:

- which members are visiting the community
- how many are contributing
- how often they come back
- the level of **interaction** between contributors
- what level of learning and depth of engagement their contributions show
- how many people are reading contributions and the benefit they gain
- the impact of people's **participation** on their work and the young people they work with (see Seddon-NCSL Five Zone Model on page 46)

In the real world we don't have that mass of statistics and nor would we have the time to analyse them. You will need to find out what statistics your software can provide.

In talk2learn, data is available on:

- membership
- visits
- unique visitors
- contributions
- individual contributions

Data can be extracted for the online community as a whole or for individual pages or items such as forums. The time period the data covers can also be set. Of course, it is important to strike a **balance** between the effort involved in collecting and analysing the data and the benefit that the information gives – in other words, don't let number-crunching become an end in itself.

However, the holy grail of a single measure of success, formed by combining the available measures, continues to be elusive. Below are some examples of the information we do produce, graded from low to high for the effort taken to create it and low to high for the usefulness of the result. You can see examples of the graphs and charts themselves online at www.ncsl.org.uk/communities.

		Effort		
		Low	Medium	High
Usefulness	High	Visitors and contributions data from system reports	Management summary showing change since previous month.	
	Medium	Monthly line graphs inform facilitators about the progress of their community	Participation and contribution percentages. Headline figures for senior management	
	Low		Graphs comparing cohorts analysing the percentage of members that visit and percentage of visitors that contribute	Weekly graph of visits and contributions, annotated to show activities and levels of learning

How loud should the buzz be?

As a rule of thumb, a good level of buzz is generated if, in one month, for a large community of practice (more than 50,000 members):

- 10 per cent of members visit
- 15 per cent of visitors contribute
- each contributor leaves between two and three contributions

and for a smaller community set up to meet a need or complete a project:

- 75 per cent of members visit
- 50 per cent of visitors contribute
- each contributor leaves between four and five contributions

and for a learning group where all participants are expected to visit as part of the course:

- 100 per cent of members visit
- 100 per cent of visitors contribute
- each contributor leaves more than five contributions

Understanding the data

Remember that figures produced by **software developers** are not always those that a manager and teacher or facilitator would find most useful. For example, the first set of figures produced for us returned the number of people using the community when the report was run, rather than the number of community members.

Understanding exactly what is meant by a visit is not straightforward. The terms 'hit', 'visit' and 'page impression' are all used to measure the number of visits, but in different ways. A **hit-counter** increases by one every time a page is displayed on the screen. Visits are increased when an item is first entered. But these are not standard across all software systems and it makes comparison between different systems difficult. Similarly, some systems count contributions from the creators of activities while others do not.

Even after the data has been produced, there are pitfalls. In our data, for example, unique visitors to different communities or in different months cannot be neatly quantified.

Shooting the messenger

When the figures are down compared with the previous month's or similar communities, people are inclined to blame the data. This is compounded if people feel they are being judged in any way. You need instead to examine possible reasons for the drop and longer term patterns, such as the rises and falls in community activity across the school year.

Different communities behave in different ways and even trying to categorise communities can be a minefield. Similarly, communities **behave differently** at different times of the year. The aim of the statistics is to build up a unique picture of individual communities to enable like-for-like comparisons to be made.

The importance of qualitative data

Is it better to have one contribution that moves a debate forward and provides **valuable insights** into a fellow participant's learning or to have a hundred low-level, 'my name is ...' contributions? The latter look better in reports, but the former will, we hope, have more impact in terms of learning and online behaviour.

We do, of course, need both meaningful contributions and high levels of participation. People engaging at a higher level of learning give the community value.

Impact on individuals

Toolkit

The theory

It is important to try to understand the impact of a particular discussion item on the knowledge, skills and understanding of individual participants. At NCSL, the **SEDDON-NCSL: Model of online learning behaviours (see page 46)** (learning behaviours taxonomy) has been used by participants and tutors to review their contributions to online discussions.

The model is based on long-term research into online interactions. It is not hierarchical, as all types of contributions are valuable in knowledge creation. Model is accompanied by questions and can be seen in full in the e-learning facilitators toolkit.

Finally

Measuring the volume of the buzz contributes to the development and growth of our communities and to the learning that takes place within them but only when it is done in a **meaningful** way.

Counting heads tells you very little by itself.

For further information, references and guidance, go to www.ncsl.org.uk/communities.

Ten Conclusion

Where do we go from here?

We have come a long way in the six years since the original Talking Heads pilot project. It brought together 1,200 new headteachers. In today's talk2learn community space, an impressive 105,000 school leaders can exchange ideas and meet for **debate, discussion and discourse**.

We have learned some valuable lessons en route.

For NCSL, learning about online communities is an ongoing process.

We continue to find out more about how to make the online space work most effectively for school leaders and how to make the very best use of the suite of tools we have at our disposal and introducing new ones like 'Virtual Classroom', meeting software, and use of existing aids such as podcast, pdf summary and videos.

Since we started writing this book, two major research and evaluation projects, carried out by Demos and the Open University, have examined the impact of talk2learn and online communities.

The key learning messages from the latest research are as follows.

- Make the community as simple as possible. Users have a limited amount of time to spend online.
- Less is definitely more: concentrate on the right activities, facilitate them well and provide participants with useful resources as a result of the activities.
- Make **extensive use of your users** to develop and promote activities. They will then use the community more.
- Make sure the participants have a very clear rationale for going online, particularly in the context of a blended learning programme of study.

Toolkit

Basic facilitator skills

Community page design
and accessibility

We have already begun to address these points by simplifying and redesigning our main communities. We have reduced the number of community spaces for participants to visit and improved the facilitation in those areas they do visit. We have also developed guidelines for publishing, both in terms of look and feel and appropriate content.

To supplement this book and help move thinking forward, we have created **a set of resources and tools online**, the e-learning facilitation toolkit. This is an outline resource which is supported by case study material. To access the toolkit go to www.ncsl.org.uk/elearningfacilitationtoolkit.

NCSL now commissions out most of the online community facilitation surrounding its Programmes (<http://www.ncsl.org.uk/programmes/index.cfm>) to regional providers so delivery is achieved at a local level. As a part of the commissioning process NCSL developed a set of **e-learning guidelines** to:

- support Programme providers in achieving sound blended learning opportunities for programme participants
- enable robust quality assurance procedures for commissioned programmes

The e-learning guidelines cover roles and responsibilities, theory, learning technologies, facilitation, talk2learn user guides, offering a useful tool for those running online communities. Of particular interest is the **e-learning evaluation matrix** which enables providers to self-review their blended learning approach and to contribute to quality assurance measures.

The guidelines appear as a PDF on the NCSL website and in folder form. The e-learning evaluation matrix is also part of the suite of matrix tools at www.ncsl.org.uk

We hope that this book has shown you that **online collaboration** is an immensely powerful way of working and can go a long way towards managing the complexities of individual learning and enriching the opportunities that technology can provide. There is potential for learners of all ages to benefit from online communities whether it is to support homework, CPD, liaison with parents, networking across schools or indeed headteachers grappling with the challenges facing school leaders into the future.

Make the most of this opportunity ... 100,000 heads really are better than one.

www.ncsl.org.uk/communities

www.ncsl.org.uk/elearningfacilitationtoolkit

Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary

A jargon-busting guide to the terminology of the world of online communities

asynchronous communication

taking part in online dialogue at a time that suits you, rather than having to participate at exactly the same time as everyone else

blended learning

a learning experience that includes online, private study and face-to-face elements; one that includes formal and informal learning approaches as well as both content and community activities

champions

members of an online community who take a lead in developing and nurturing colleagues, individual activities and/or communities

closed communities

communities restricted to a specific membership

community (online)

a space where like-minded individuals can contribute information via a computer in order to socialise, network and share their learning, knowledge and skills

community lifecycle (online)

the stages through which an online community develops from inception to long-term sustainability or closure if its work is done

contribution

text, images and/or sounds added to an activity in the online community by an individual

conversation

the simplest type of online forum where all typed contributions are made in the same way by each participant and appear one after another in the same coloured text.

Contributors are identified by their name and a photograph (icon). The time and date of their contribution is displayed

CPD

continuing professional development

debate

an online forum where contributors adopt one of up to five possible positions on offer to them when making their online contribution. This type of forum allows participants to debate and argue for or against a particular point. Each position is represented by different coloured text. There is an option to vote at the end of the debate. Contributors are all identified by their name and a photograph (icon). The time and date of their contribution is displayed

DfES

Department for Education and Skills

discussion

a very flexible online forum which offers the most participant choice. Participants can define the subject of their contribution, respond to topics raised by others or choose to start a new topic for discussion. There are options to expand the text in full or contract it as headings, and to determine how the page is formatted

e-learning

online learning and e-learning are sometimes used synonymously and can be defined as: learning that takes place in an environment or situation that is enabled, enhanced or supported by online or electronic technology

e-learning facilitator

education professionals who support NCSL online communities within talk2learn. E-learning facilitators plan, design, evaluate and develop online communities. They encourage and enable groups of school leaders to share their learning in a friendly environment, in which members feel comfortable about participating in online discussion, sharing information and publishing their own items

emoticons

little icons, often faces or symbols, that depict an emotion on line

engagement

the act by which participants hold a dialogue

Fast Track

a national scheme in which high-performing graduates are brought into teaching with the expectation of fast promotion

facilitation and facilitator

facilitation is a personalised process that empowers and challenges individuals and groups to engage in significant learning. A facilitator is a person with the knowledge, skills and understanding of effective facilitation. An online facilitator encourages, supports and enables groups such as school leaders to share their learning and maintain a friendly environment in which members feel comfortable about participating in discussion, sharing information and publishing their own items

formal learning

instructional approaches such as educational courses and programmes. The learner is taken through a body of knowledge in a structured, step-by-step way. These online courses may also lead to certification or accreditation in some way

forum

a space for online collaboration which enables participants to communicate using typed text

hotseat

an online forum that enables questions and answers. Contributions appear directly under the relevant question. Other contributors are able to reply to answers provided and points raised by the person in the hotseat

icon

a small graphic or on-screen representation of an object such as a document, program or folder. All talk2learn members can have an individual icon next to their name

informal (or non-formal) learning

unstructured approaches to learning. They include the social construction of knowledge in online communities and access to online resources such as presentations, documents, journal articles and discussion forums

knowledge management

the collation of online activities, contributions and information to provide digests or summaries for future use. The process of annotating and describing all collaborative activities, contributions and information

leadership learning

exploration and development of ways that leaders can learn individually and together

leading-edge school or partnership

a pioneering, forward-thinking school or partnership where practitioners work together to

tackle some of the more difficult challenges facing the education system

learning behaviours taxonomy

a model that can be used by participants and tutors to review their contributions to online discussions

learning facilitator

a person with the knowledge, skills and understanding of effective facilitation

Learning Gateway

NCSL's online portal which allows access to a range of online and face-to-face learning activities. The Learning Gateway is a managed learning environment that supports NCSL's core business of delivering continuous professional development to school leaders

learning journey

the journey of an individual through a range of learning activities

learning pathway

the route taken by an individual through a range of learning activities

LftM

NCSL programme called Leading from the Middle

lurker

a term used in the early days of online communities for those who read but do not contribute to discussions. They are now more commonly referred to as readers

member

a person who has access to a community or a number of online communities

managed learning environment (MLE)

a range of information systems and processes of an organisation that contribute indirectly to learning and its management, such as the NCSL Learning Gateway

NCSL

National College for School Leadership

NLG

Networked Learning Group

NPQH

NCSL programme called National Professional Qualification for Headteachers

online community learning environment (OCLE)

space in which participants collaborate to enhance learning activities and contribute to activities

online learning

sometimes used synonymously with e-learning. Can be defined as learning that takes place in an environment or situation that is enabled, enhanced or supported by online or electronic technology

participant

a user of one or more online communities who actively takes part in online dialogue

pathways

a structured route through talk2learn to a community area. Pathways may contain communities and other pathways but cannot contain any community content. This is also sometimes called a breadcrumb trail

programme

a development course offered by NCSL to support school leaders, recognising the different strengths, needs and aspirations of leaders at all stages of their careers. A list of all programmes can be found in the NCSL Prospectus

programme community

a community associated with a development programme linked to the NCSL Leadership Development Framework. Examples are NPQH and LftM

reader

a term used to describe those who read the content of discussions but do not contribute. Reading online dialogue is viewed as a valuable learning experience

single sign-on (SSO)

a one-click mechanism that enables a user to log in just once to access all the e-learning resources provided by NCSL's managed learning environment and talk2learn

SLICT

NCSL programme called Strategic Leadership of ICT

synchronous communication

simultaneous online dialogue in which everyone contributes at the same time (see asynchronous for the opposite)

talk2learn

the brand name for NCSL's online community learning environment (OCLE)

Talking Heads

a talk2learn community for headteachers only

taxonomy

a model of online learning behaviours that can be used by participants and tutors to review their contributions to online discussions

think.com

the original software used as the basis for Talking Heads and talk2learn, created by Oracle

tutor

a person responsible for executing a programme module for a specific group of participants

Virtual Heads

the online community supporting the NCSL programme NPQH

vote

an online tool for capturing opinions anonymously

weaving

the summarising and collection of the ideas from an online dialogue to aid further discussion. Often used part way through a dialogue

Appendix B:**Top ten tips for developing your community as presented at the BETT show 2007**

- 1** Facilitation and community champions. Investing in your staff to help them become online facilitators and champions will reap a rich reward.
- 2** Build participation by nurturing a culture amongst your staff and students that 'donating learning of their own' and acknowledging the personal gain from the experiences of others enriches the learning
- 3** Hold regular dialogue with guests. Specialist! Experts! Provocateurs! Presents a great opportunity to use staff, student and parent expertises.
- 4** Measure the volume of the buzz in your online community as it contributes to the development and growth of the community and to the learning that takes place there. Know your impact socially and on
- 5** Developing the 'blended' approach to learning.
- 6** Evaluate the online learning environments that are on offer by keeping in front of you a copy of what you have agreed about how e-learning will support your organisations ambitions. This will help you ask the right questions about VLE, MLE and intranets.
- 7** Always keep the user/learner in mind when developing the online community. If in doubt what to do next go back to the learner's needs. Root your online communities in a theoretical base. This will bring
- 8** Make technology the servant not the driver by having a vision.
- 9** talk2learn provides a safe and supportive environment for school leaders to experience online learning through collaborative dialogue. A place to try it out first for yourself, so you can lead by example later.
- 10** Begin with your learning and teaching policy for developing any such online community.

Appendix C: Acknowledgements

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“ talk2learn has helped me overcome that element of isolation from which many heads suffer ”

“ It has opened a new world of contacts and opportunities for professional dialogue ”

“ The wisdom of other heads was invaluable in shaping what we eventually developed ”

“ I think talk2learn has been of seminal importance ”

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