NCSL National College for School Leadership

learning from each other | learning with each other | learning on behalf of each other

Networked Learning Group
at BERA Annual Meeting 2005

14–17 September, 2005
University of Glamorgan, Wales

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other | learning with each other | learning on behalf of each other

BERA 2005

National College for School Leadership
Networked Learning Communities programme

The Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme, launched in September 2002, brings together clusters of schools, Local Authorities, Higher Education Institutions and the wider community, to work collaboratively to raise standards and improve opportunities for their pupils. The NLC programme is almost certainly the largest such initiative in the world, and is the National College for School Leadership's (NCSL's) largest development and research programme. The main aims of the programme are to develop good network forums, learn about networked learning and to influence the wider education system.

There are currently 133 Networked Learning Communities collaborating across the country, including approximately 1,500 schools, 25,000 staff and over 500,000 pupils. This represents around five per cent of the schools in the country. In addition, 19 Local Authorities are now involved in a development and research project which is acting as a test-bed for initial findings generated from the main programme.

This paper will present two case studies, based on extensive interviewing with school and community leaders, of NLCs which have pursued community engagement as a major aim. We will show how these NLCs have followed very different approaches, in part because of their somewhat different demographic and socio-economic contexts. We will argue that the differences between the NLCs can be understood by locating their approaches along a series of dimensions and that, by inter-relating these dimensions, it is possible to identify a series of 'models' of NLC community engagement. These are, we shall suggest, useful analytically and may also prove useful for informing policy and practice in this field. This may be particularly important as many schools and Local Authorities explore the implications of the Children Act 2004 for how groups of schools respond to the needs of the neighbourhoods and areas they serve.

Contact details and descriptions of some of the products developed through the programme are illustrated at the end of this booklet.

Session four, 16 September, 9am –10.30am, Room H39 (symposium reference number: 218)
Chair – Mark Hadfield, National College for School Leadership & University of Wolverhampton
Researching networks in education
Networked Learning Communities Programme, National College for School Leadership

---

Paper one (Ref 0858)
Teacher learning, teacher enquiry and research
Colleen McLaughlin, University of Cambridge

Paper two (Ref 0859)
Networked Learning Communities and community engagement
Charlotte Dean & Alan Dyson, University of Manchester

Paper three (Ref 0860)
New Spaces for Dialogue? What are adults learning about consulting students in networks?
Jane McGregor, National College for School Leadership

Paper four (Ref 0861)
Shotgun weddings, arranged marriages or love matches?
An investigation of Networked Leaning Communities and Higher Education partnerships
Ann Campbell, Liverpool Hope University College & Iris Keating, Manchester Metropolitan University

Researching networks in education
Network Learning Communities symposium

The Networked Learning Communities programme, launched in September 2002, brings together clusters of schools, Local Authorities, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the wider community, to work collaboratively to raise standards and improve opportunities for their pupils. The programme is almost certainly the largest such initiative in the world, and is the National College for School Leadership's largest development and research project. There are now 137 Networked Learning Communities collaborating across the country, including approximately 1,500 schools, 25,000 staff and over 500,000 pupils. In addition, 21 Local Authorities are now involved in an additional development and research programme which is acting as a test-bed for the initial findings generated from the main programme.

The NLC programme is a large-scale development and research project committed to learning in real time, ie making information available to the system when it is useful, on how networks may provide a means of facilitating innovation and change as well as contributing to large scale reform. The key operational manifestation of these principles is the framework of enquiry and research questions and agreed protocols and methodologies for working collaboratively with practitioners and the research community. The questions and methodological challenges represent an exacting 'learning programme' that depends upon purposeful collaboration between the research community and practitioners.

The research capacity within the programme consists of 26 facilitators, who work directly with networks of schools, and a smaller core group of full-time researchers. Organised as regional teams, and supported by a strong knowledge management infrastructure, this core and extended team carry out a wide range of research and inquiry projects, many collaboratively with networks. Some are programme-wide studies, others involve more targeted and focused research. The capacity is extended through projects commissioned with HEIs to build on and extend existing relationships with NLCs and the Networked Learning Group (NLG) who operate the project.

A major aim of the NLG is to strategically promote different forms of collaboration and partnership in education through research, and the four main papers in this symposium address issues relating to such linkages through focusing on different ways of working with partners and constituents. The NLG are creating research clusters which bring together commissioned partners and networks to examine what we are learning about networks in education – constructing and demonstrating an appropriate knowledge base. This interactive symposium also aims to provide a forum to examine how such relationships may be developed in the changing field of education policy.

Researching networks in education

Paper one

Teacher learning, teacher enquiry and research
Supporting practitioner research and enquiry through networks

Colleen McLaughlin
University of Cambridge Faculty of Education

cm10009@cam.ac.uk

This paper will draw on research into practitioner research and enquiry undertaken in six Networked Learning Communities in England in 2004-5. Through the six case studies, the paper will address two central questions:

1 What is understood by research and enquiry?
2 What is the impact or effect of research and enquiry on the school?

The intersection between teacher learning, professional development and practitioner research and enquiry will be explored.

Paper two

Networked Learning Communities and community engagement

Charlotte Dean & Alan Dyson
University of Manchester

d.a.dyson@manchester.ac.uk

By definition, Networked Learning Communities are concerned with developing notions of community. For the most part, the communities in question are those constituted by the students and professionals in participating schools. However, in a few cases, the strengthening of these 'internal' communities is paralleled by a systematic attempt to engage with the 'external' communities constituted by parents, local residents, community agencies and organisations, and local employers. Whilst we have some understanding of relationships between individual schools and 'external' communities of this kind, the impact of networking in this field is relatively little understood.

Paper three

New Spaces for Dialogue? What are adults learning about consulting students in networks?

Jane McGregor
National College for School Leadership

jane.mcgregor@ncsl.org.uk

As an enquiry and development programme, the NLC project is committed to 'real-time research' to inform the system and is developing collaborative methodologies for working with practitioners. Programme level enquiries are conducted with networks by the field team of facilitators, in addition to annual reviews of progress and more formal research. In the first cohort of NLCs, thirty per cent identified pupil voice as a strong feature of their networked learning at the submission stage, and there is evidence that different forms of pupil voice have gained significant purchase across the programme.

Emerging evidence from the NLC programme enquiries suggests that student involvement in networks has important potential for building capacity and 'bottom-up change' in the system, for example, through different forms of collaborative enquiry, particularly when focused on the conditions of learning. In a recent review, 55 per cent of NLCs identified research and enquiry with pupils as a significant achievement. This paper describes some developments which illustrate the power of pupil voice and dialogue as a dimension of networks.

Paper four

Shotgun weddings, arranged marriages or love matches? An investigation of Networked Leaning Communities and Higher Education partnerships

Anne Campbell
Liverpool Hope University College

Iris Keating
Manchester Metropolitan University

campbea@hope.ac.uk

This paper sets out to discuss a project, commissioned by NCSL's Networked Learning Group, which investigated the variety of partnerships, links and collaborations that exist between Networked Learning Communities and Higher Education Institutions.

This paper will report on data gained through interview and interrogation of databases, proforma surveys and questionnaires and on fieldwork which has generated over ten case studies. It also uses material from an NVIVO scan of the NLG's Spring Enquiry. It would appear that no more than a third, at most, of NLCs are in effective partnerships with HEIs. Nonetheless, some excellent practice has been generated and examples of this will be reported. As will be explained, a range of different partnerships exist between NLCs and HEIs and these partnerships vary in both strength and quality, and mutual commitment. They also take many forms and the paper explores a variety of modes of collaboration. The origins of these links, whether geographical, historical or serendipitous, are examined, and the role of 'personalities' reviewed.

The paper looks at structures which facilitate linkage and examines attitudes and perceptions on both sides which appear to have been influential. The issue of sustainability when NLG funding ends is discussed and, in that context, the paper finally returns to one of the more popular models of collaboration, the action research model, which is seen as a successful way of returning to teachers some autonomy over their professional development, much of which has been lost in recent years.

NCSL publications and resources

Nexus

To celebrate existing examples of networked learning activity, the Networked Learning Communities' printed magazine, Nexus, is published three times a year. Available free of charge, Nexus is the magazine of choice for over 10,000 subscribers involved in, or committed to, networking and collaboration. Past themes have included: networked learning, pupil voice, impact on pupil learning, leadership and different network types. The autumn 2005 edition will focus on system leadership in action, showing the connection between school-to-school networking and network-to-network activity.

If you would like to order past copies or subscribe to the regular mailing list, please email your full name and postal address to **nlc@ncsl.org.uk**

Network leadership in action series

As part of the Networked Learning Communities programme, the National College for School Leadership has been conducting research amongst network leaders and others in leadership and support roles in school networks to find out how they have interpreted their roles. What has emerged is an understanding of the key issues facing leaders and an appreciation of the complexity and importance of their role in school networks.

The tools in this series have been generated largely through the work of the Networked Learning Communities programme over the past two years. They draw upon the findings of a research seminar, the outcomes of a collaborative enquiry undertaken by Ron Ritchie and the NLC steering group, and from collaborative work with Demos.

Network leadership roles

One of the distinctive features of successful networks is dedicated facilitation and leadership. These development tools describe the work of network leaders and others in leadership and support roles in school networks. They identify key roles, reflective questions, possible starting points and examples from practice.

Getting started with Networked Research Lesson Study

The resources in this publication provide a network leader's guide to getting started with Networked Research Lesson Study. These include guidance on planning for and undertaking Research Lessons in networks, snapshots of practice, and development tools and templates, accompanied by a DVD.

Getting started with Networked Learning Walks

This development tool provides network leaders with all they need to get started with Networked Learning Walks. It provides guidance on planning for and undertaking a Learning Walk in a school network and includes tools and templates designed for use in supporting the process.

What are we learning about…? series

The *What are we learning about…?* series is designed to make public the learning that has emerged from NCSL's Networked Learning Communities programme and other initiatives during the last two years.

Edition one: LEA involvement in school networks

In the first edition in the series we outline some of the different roles which Local Education Authorities (LEAs) perform and look at concrete examples of what that looks like in practice. We explore the concept of brokerage as a way of describing what LEAs do to support networks of schools.

Edition two: Establishing a network of schools

In the second edition in the series we outline the key elements we have found to be evident when establishing a network of schools. We explore why networks are important and what is distinctive about collaborative working.
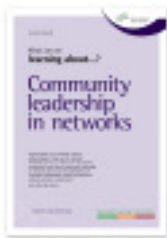
Edition three: Community leadership in networks

In the third edition in the series we look at the importance of building community leadership in networks. We consider how the national policy agenda to ensure Every Child Matters (2003) is beginning to be acted out in local networked contexts. Through exploring different perspectives of community leadership we consider the tensions, opportunities and challenges involved in moving from homogenous school-based networks to more diverse heterogenous community-based networks.

Edition four: 'Making mathematics count' in school networks

In the fourth edition in this series we outline what we have found to be the characteristics of effective school learning networks and describe what they look like in practice. We also look at how networks of teachers are helping to address three key issues associated with effective teaching and learning in mathematics:

1 Doing mathematics together in networks to enhance specialist subject knowledge and increase the supply of confident teachers of mathematics.
2 Planning and working together in networks to ensure that the current and developing mathematics curriculum, assessment and qualifications framework meets the needs of all learners.
3 Problem-solving and learning together in networks to provide the infrastructure required to support mathematics teachers effectively, particularly in terms of their continuing professional development.

These ideas are then illustrated through a series of think pieces, accounts of practice and development tools. These are intended to enable you to engage with theory, practice and policy perspectives on the best of what we are learning about…

To order copies, or to sign up for future editions, please email **nlc@ncsl.org.uk** or download from **www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc**

Connecting up online…

talk2learn: Learning Networks Exchange

The Learning Networks Exchange online community in talk2learn aims to connect up thinking around learning networks.

Online tools now available for use in the new talk2learn are:

• live chat
• survey & voting functions
• hotseat
• co-construction of a document
• varied dialogue opportunities
• network online communities

Access online or register to be a member of the Learning Networks Exchange online community at **www.talk2learn.com**

NCSL Networked Learning Group website

The new NLG website is now live with up-to-the-minute information on networked learning opportunities, programmes, publications and resources.

Downloadable information is available on the Networked Learning Group's:

• work and activities
• programmes and events
• publications and resources
• steering group and associates opportunities

Take a look at the new website resource at **www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc**

NLG Learning Exchange Online (LEO)

The LEO website provides networks with a space to share their work, ideas, resources and learning.

LEO's powerful search engine enables you to search for the latest publications, documents, events and news from networks nationwide and includes:

• network homepages
• links to useful websites
• network news and information
• document upload and download

A new guest log-in facility is now available or you can register for full membership at **www.nlcexchange.org.uk**