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# Learning about ICT in learning networks



*"...my vision is one where schools are confidently, successfully and routinely exploiting ICT alongside other transformational measures. By doing so, they will be delivering an education that equips learners for life in the Information Age of the 21st century."*

Charles Clarke

## Learning about ICT in learning networks

The use of ICT emerges from the National College for School Leadership's (NCSL) Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme as one of the central architectural features of learning networks. Knowledge drawn firstly from collaborative activity within NLCs, and secondly from network-to-network development and enquiry activity supported by the Networked Learning Group has provided rich pictures of two main strands of ICT use:

1. Building and sustaining a network.
2. Developing innovative practice in learning and teaching.

The examples in this summary provide a flavour of the ways in which school networks have promoted learning at different levels within their learning community.<sup>1</sup>

## Using ICT to build and sustain the network

Five distinct types of activity characterise the use of ICT in the development of NLCs:

1. Creating a sense of identity.
2. Building new routes to networking.
3. Sharing resources and information.
4. Increasing reach.
5. Increasing responsiveness.

### Creating a sense of identity

*Discussion groups/email* supports **school-to-school learning** by offering a site that provides information on the NLC but also marks important community milestones.

#### Example from practice

Not just an NLC, but a network of networks, the **Arts Learning North West Network** is made up of 46 arts colleges. With so many member schools, electronic communication is the only practical way to communicate efficiently and quickly with as many members as possible. At the same time, distributing a shared newsletter and maintaining a weblog are effective ways of building a network identity.

### Building new routes to networking

*Video conferencing and webcams* support **school-wide learning** by creating opportunities to find and engage in dialogue with new colleagues.

#### Example from practice

In the **Hastings and St Leonard's Education Action Zone**, video conferencing was used as a solution to train school meals supervisors whose widespread locations and limited availability would have made a training programme involving personal travel an impractical option.

## Sharing resources and information

Multimedia artefacts help support **leadership learning** by facilitating knowledge transfer.

### Example from practice

**Tyneside NLC**, a network of six secondary schools, has focused on coaching. Part of the coaching process has involved videoing and reviewing lessons for personal professional development, for the benefit of its intra-school coaching triad and for NQT training and development.

## Increasing reach

A webpage/virtual learning environment supports **adult learning** by connecting people beyond those central to the NLC (eg teachers who wish to access new teaching resources or parents who want better communication with their school).

### Example from practice

Halsnood Community Primary and Training School is a member of the **Knowsley Southern Area Network**. Its webpage/virtual learning environment supports **school-wide learning**, providing public information and learning materials including:

- games and activities for both children and parents
- help sheets and tutorials on how to use some of the most popular software in Knowsley schools
- examples of children's work
- modules for foreign language study
- links for pupils, teachers and students

## Increasing responsiveness

Video conferencing and webcams support **network-to-network** learning through the quick dissemination of information.

### Example from practice

In an example from outside NLCs, a primary advisor in Devon delivered a presentation on the foundation curriculum to teachers and governors in three venues simultaneously in a multipoint video conference.

## Using ICT to develop innovative practice in learning and teaching

From the ICT practice emerging through the processes of building and sustaining networked learning communities, it is possible to derive five categories of innovative ICT practice in networks:

1. Webpages and virtual or managed learning environments.
2. Discussion groups/emails.
3. Multimedia artefacts.
4. Video-conferencing/webcams.
5. ICT based collaborative enquiry tools.

The final example from practice gives detail about the fifth area of innovation in ICT use: **developing ICT based collaborative enquiry tools**.

### Example from practice

The **Janus** network's ICT Co-ordinators' Group has ensured that resources are shared with others on shared drives in schools and via training and CD-Rom. What the network adds is a collaborative dimension that enables schools to share ideas as resources and practices are being constructed.<sup>2</sup>

For example, *Chocolate Palace* is a multimedia resource for literacy created by children and overseen by a Year 3 teacher who wanted to make cross-curricular links between literacy, ICT and design and technology. The class spent three weeks on this one activity, writing their own fairy story and creating interactive e-books using PowerPoint.

When the project was finished, it became a network artefact used in staff ICT training for the network as a whole, where it was shown as an example of how cross-curricular links can be made in literacy. One boy described how much he had enjoyed working on the project. Before that he did not feel capable of extended writing at all.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Thorpe, M, Kubiak, C & Jelfs, A, 2004, *Report on Key Issues and Experience from the Scoping of Networks' Use of ICT*, mid year 2004 (unpublished report for the Networked Learning Group)
- <sup>2</sup> From *Janus Annual Enquiry 2005 Case Study* available at [www.ncsl.org.uk/nlg](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/nlg)  
For further examples access the full matrix report, *Facilitated learning through the innovative use of ICT*, at [www.ncsl.org.uk/media/9F8/8B/nlg\\_ICT\\_matrix.pdf](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/media/9F8/8B/nlg_ICT_matrix.pdf)

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