

Book Review

Developing a Networked School Community: A guide to realising the vision
Edited by Mal Lee and Glenn Finger
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Developing a Networked School Community analyses the latest research on the digital capacity of young people and their home environments to provide a compelling case for schools to adopt a more collaborative, networked model of schooling with the goal of better preparing young people for a digital and networked future.

The book outlines the nature of collaborative networks and their relevance and value to schooling in the 21st century. It describes networked schools as operating through collaborative relationships with young people, educators, school leaders, families and the wider community to develop sustainable and evolving 21st century learning environments and experiences that accommodate the changing needs of their local communities. In the view of the authors, strong learning networks can support individualised learning with engaging, and relevant teaching and learning experiences.

The authors explore the possibilities, risks and challenges in developing digital networked communities and investigate how to leverage increases in home and mobile computing capacity to forge a strong home-school nexus. They go on to present twelve guiding principles for the move to a networked mode of schooling, which is not bound by the physical constraints of school walls and timetables and which recognises and values the informal and formal learning that takes place beyond school.

The more significant challenges acknowledged are the infrastructure investments required and the substantial change in attitudes and approaches required of school systems: the author's view is that the major barrier will be people's lack of willingness to change which they assert can be overcome. The book also challenges education authorities to shift their focus from large scale, system-wide ICT projects to focus on universal home access for every student.

In relation to access to digital technology, the authors propose a public-private model, encouraging the pooling of resources where families have already made a 'digital investment'. They also propose the adoption of a shared focus on digital citizenship, with alternate approaches to the supervision of young people's access to and use of digital technologies.

The book refers once again to the research about the extent to which the majority of young people have access to digital and internet enabled devices and the growing home-school digital divide. However some readers will be discouraged by the lack of consideration for situations where access to digital technology and amenable home environments are not a given. Many educators are keenly aware of the geographical, socio-economic and cultural factors that disadvantage a significant minority of students and would likely be concerned about a failure to incorporate strategies to avoid further discrimination.

Developing a Networked School Community is a practical read that will appeal to school leaders, teachers and communities interested in exploring the potential of networked learning communities and in involving students' homes more fully in teaching and learning.