About Networking for Learning

Introduction

A network focused on learning is one in which a group of schools join together to plan, implement and monitor a range of activities that will enhance learning and teaching within and across their schools. The schools in the network can achieve more than if they work alone. Learning networks focus on learning of pupils, all staff, leaders and other stakeholders, as well as building capacity for learning and sharing knowledge between schools.

The Networking for Learning simulation is an interactive tool which has been created to help you in the development of your learning network. The Innovation Unit has worked closely with the creators, David Crandall and Louise Stoll, and the Networked Learning Group of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) to develop this resource. It aims to engage primary school leaders and teachers in an interactive, educational and fun introduction to the potential and the challenges involved in developing learning networks. The simulation is anchored firmly in research and has been developed with support and guidance from a number of primary educators and international experts in the field of networking.

Networking for Learning is suitable for those already engaged in a learning network, as a tool for refreshing and refining your work, and for those embarking on a new venture, as a collaborative planning tool. Using it will bring out many of the issues and challenges you are likely to face for real as you plan and initiate your learning network. Regardless of your prior experience with networks or networking, the simulation will help you to consider the extent to which your network is focused on learning and what approaches are likely to have the best chance of success. Having a chance to try out possible responses when there are no real-time consequences is one of the big pluses of simulations. And, dare we say it, simulations are fun! **We hope you enjoy it.**

innovation

David Crandall and Louise Stoll

NCSL
National College for School Leadership

01 Your task

Networking for Learning asks you and your colleagues to adopt the mindset of a team of helpers/consultants whose brief is to help a group of schools create a network focused on learning. Ideally, members of the simulated learning network are brought together by a compelling idea or vision related to enhancing pupils' learning, share a common purpose, and are committed to working, learning and improving together.

- In the simulation, you will be presented with five schools and 26 staff representing a range of typical teachers and school leaders; they are not the entire staff of a given school. You will have access to initial information about the schools and 26 characters.

- Each year you'll have a budget of 40 tokens to spend on activities you believe will make progress toward your goals. You can't carry over unused funds, so spend wisely but be sure to spend each year's allotment.

- You and your teammates will work together to choose from a list of 36 activities to initiate a network that is focused on the improvement of learning and teaching, and then develop it to the point where it is sustainable.

- Each time you choose an activity you will receive feedback. Characters may move, signifying progress toward sustainability. Sometimes you may also receive either benefits [evidence of pupil learning gains] or capacity enhancements [evidence of increased staff, school or network capacity to support learning].

Important

This simulation is NOT a role play where you take on the role of one of the characters within the simulation. Rather, you will be yourself, working as a team with others, trying to help an imaginary group of schools create a learning network through decisions your team makes to "move" the characters on the simulation board.

Your team will have a simulated three years to accomplish three main goals:

- Move as many members of five diverse schools as possible through the stages of change associated with the development of a sustainable network – from 'exploring' to 'sustainable'.

- Produce as many learner benefits and as much increased capacity as possible through improvements in learning and teaching growing out of the network's progress and success.

- Deepen your own learning and understanding about successful networks for learning and teaching by taking the opportunity to discuss with colleagues in a risk-free environment the issues and challenges presented.

At the end of each of the three years you will be asked to reflect on your team's experience thus far, the issues raised by the experience, and the implications for the plans of your own network. The dialogue provoked by your reflections is likely to be one of the biggest payoffs of playing the game. If your planning group has the time, or is able to repeat the simulation again as you go forward, you might want one of your team to act as an 'enquiry facilitator' who focuses the group's reflection time and records observations and insights. Such notes should not only be helpful to your team but also a means of sharing your learning with others as your work progresses.

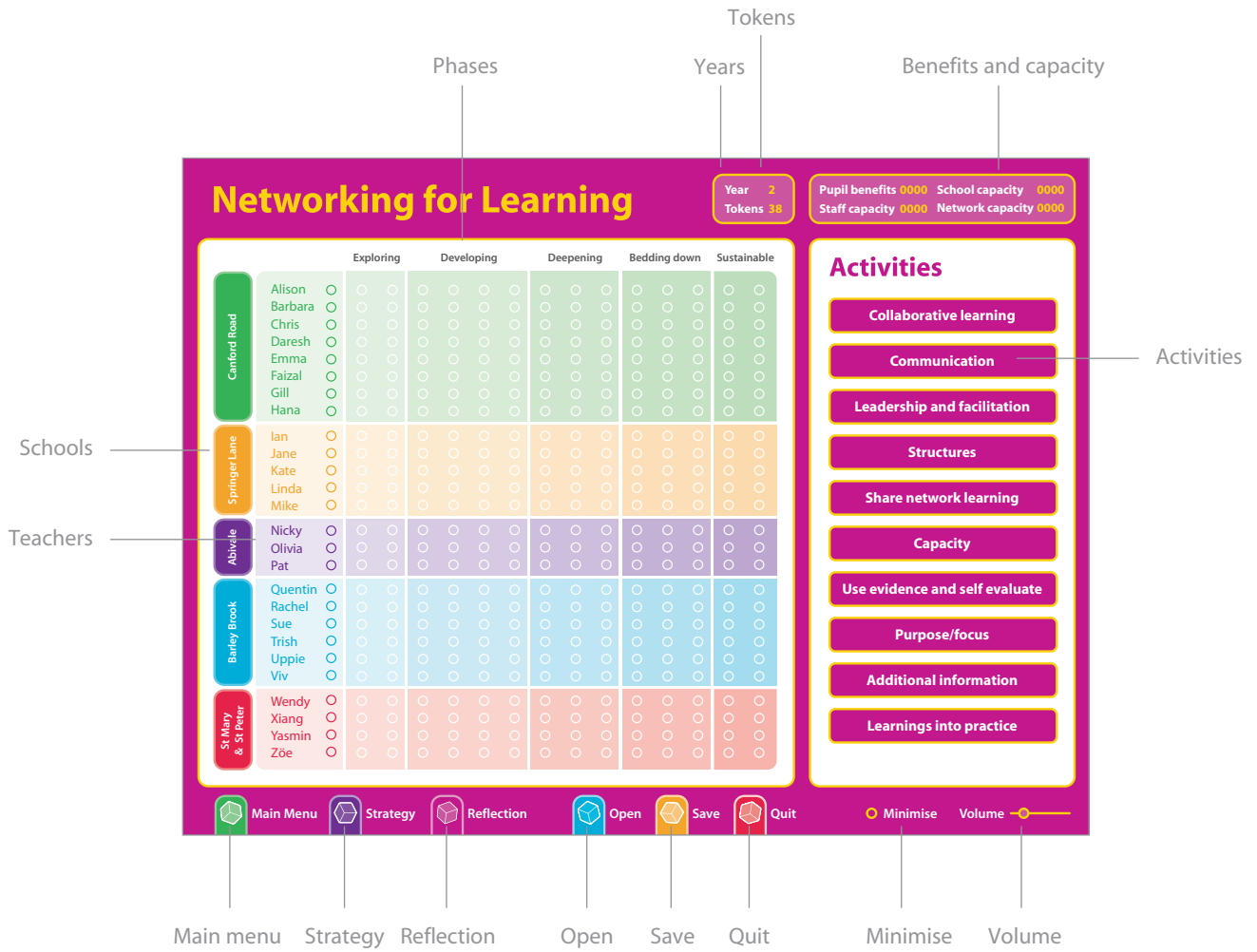Your player team should assume the following:

- You've taken the decision to go forward but do not yet have the broader support or commitment of the five schools' heads or their staff.

- The people in the schools (the characters on the simulation board) whom you need to influence know nothing about this effort.

- You have just begun to focus on the goals of the simulation and have three years to accomplish your goals.

Good luck!

02 **The Game Board**

The simulation is centred on the game board which shows the progress of the characters through the stages of learning network development from left ('Exploring') to right ('Sustainable').

Tokens

Phases   Years   Benefits and capacity

Networking for Learning

| | | Year | 2 |
| | | Tokens | 38 |

| Pupil benefits | 0000 | School capacity | 0000 |
| Staff capacity | 0000 | Network capacity | 0000 |

		Exploring	Developing	Deepening	Bedding down	Sustainable

Canford Road
Alison
Barbara
Chris
Daresh
Emma
Faizal
Gill
Hana

Springer Lane
Ian
Jane
Kate
Linda
Mike

Abivale
Nicky
Olivia
Pat

Barley Brook
Quentin
Rachel
Sue
Trish
Uppie
Viv

St Mary & St Peter
Wendy
Xiang
Yasmin
Zöe

Activities

Collaborative learning

Communication

Leadership and facilitation

Structures

Share network learning

Capacity

Use evidence and self evaluate

Purpose/focus

Additional information

Learnings into practice

Activities

Schools

Teachers

Main Menu   Strategy   Reflection   Open   Save   Quit   Minimise   Volume

Main menu   Strategy   Reflection   Open   Save   Quit   Minimise   Volume

Note:
For an opportunity to 'try out' some of the key functions of the simulation, access the Tutorial within the CD.
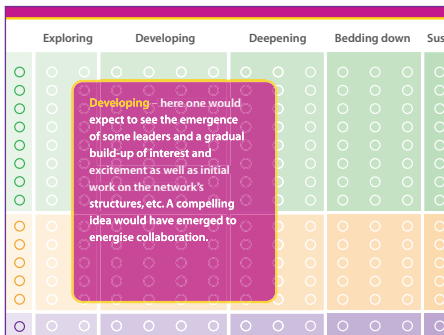
03 Schools

There are five schools in the simulation. Each of the five schools is described on a special card in the game box and the description is also accessible from within the simulation by clicking on the school name. They represent five of the schools in one network. The schools are intended to represent a broad range of schools in England i.e., "real schools/like my school" or "a school I know well". In reality, these schools might not usually be found within close geographical range of each other. This means that as you engage with the simulation, you will need to imagine that these schools are in one network. You'll need to familiarise yourselves with the schools and their staff.

04 Characters

There are 26 characters in the simulation, all based in the five schools. Each of them is described on a special card in the box (the colour corresponds with that of the school to which they belong) and you can access their descriptions by clicking on the character name on the game board. The characters are intended to represent the range of roles and personalities that might be found in a network. They sit on a continuum from huge enthusiasm to serious resistance towards change and innovation. The only character common to all five schools is a headteacher, and there are more characters in the larger schools.

05 **Phases**

Explore the phases by selecting them

In developing a network there can be many fits and starts and many cycles of change. For the simulation we have laid out a simple five phase flow that people in schools have told us rings true for them, although in reality these phases are not always linear.

The five phases are:

- Exploring – this initial stage is where people who might get more seriously involved begin to gather basic information with special attention to "what does this mean for me?"

- Developing – here one would expect to see the emergence of some leaders and a gradual build-up of interest and excitement as well as initial work on the network's structures, etc. A compelling idea would have emerged to energise collaboration.

- Deepening – at this point, the basic structures and operating parameters of the network have generally been sorted, widespread participation is evident, and focused activity directed at creating learning opportunities and trying out new practices would be well underway.

- Bedding down – as the network stabilises, widespread participation is underpinned by high levels of trust, clear indications of payoff for staff and schools and benefits for pupils. Frequent communication to a range of stakeholders moves the mature network towards a confident future.

- Sustainable – as benefits to pupils accumulate and the capacity of staff and school grows, the larger network realises collective rewards, and sets its resource decisions around a priority of maintaining a network that is vibrant. Its projects are regularly reflected upon and often reviewed, and always focused on learning.

06 **Activities**
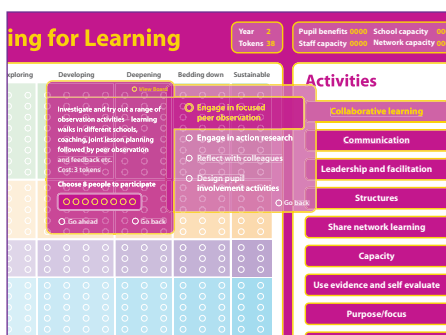
Activities selection showing description
and its cost in tokens
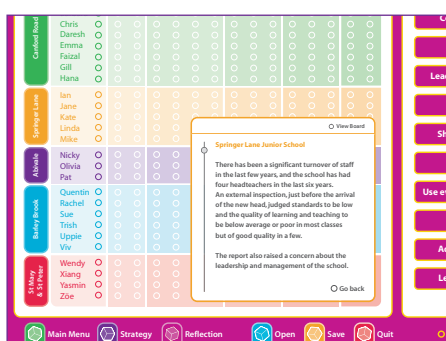
Feedback card indicating results of
activity action

To help people learn about the emerging network and take the
steps needed to see progress, your team will choose from an array of
activities that have been shown to advance network development.

There are 36 activities grouped under ten headings which are set out to the right
of the game board. The A2 poster in the simulation box lists the activities.

Each activity carries a 'cost' in tokens which represent the resources of time,
effort and money available to you each year.

1 Click on an activity heading to see the activities within.

2 Clicking on a specific activity allows you to view a description of the activity and
its cost in tokens. You can either implement the activity – 'go ahead' – or 'go back'
to look at different activities.

3 To implement an activity, follow the instructions provided about selecting
individuals or schools to take part in the activity.

4 To select individuals, click on the circle to the right of the character name.
To select schools, click on the school name. When you have selected individual
characters, the circle next to the name becomes filled.

5 To implement the activity click on 'Go ahead' and the tokens will automatically
be deducted.

6 Next, you'll receive one or more feedback cards indicating the results of your
action. *Read the cards carefully as they provide valuable clues about future
activity choices.*

7 Characters (represented by coloured counters) will automatically move on the
board (or not) in response to activities. Some activities will also result in impact
rewards called benefits or capacity.

Important

Many of the activities can be
repeated. For example, the 'Talk
with' activity requires you to select
two or three people each time. Since
there are 26 people to choose from,
you probably will consider choosing
this activity more than once and will
usually want to choose three people
rather than two because it'll give
you better value for your tokens.

07 Benefits and Capacity

Benefits and capacity enhancements are displayed in the top right corner of the simulation board

As you progress in developing the network in the simulation (that is, select activities that by their nature or sequence relative to previous choices lead to movement of characters on the board), you may accumulate impact rewards. These are pupil benefits and capacity enhancements, representing increased capacity for staff, school and the network as a whole. They are displayed in the upper right corner of the simulation board.

Pupil benefits – more positive learning experiences and greater engagement with the learning process, as well as academic and social progress, development and achievement.

Staff capacity – increased motivation and use of skills and pedagogical strategies that help improve learning and teaching for all pupils.

School capacity – an increase in the power of whole school communities to get involved in and sustain learning at all levels. This is a blend of motivation, skill, positive leadership, organisational conditions and culture.

Network capacity – an increase in the mutual commitment and shared responsibility of individuals and different school communities in relation to other network schools, colleagues and pupils, and their power to make effective decisions that will help promote benefits for pupils in all schools in the network.

08 Tokens

The currency you'll be using the simulation is called 'tokens'. Tokens represent time, effort and money. You will receive an annual allocation of 40 tokens that must be spent in each year. None can be carried forward so spend wisely, but spend!

Important

As responsible school leaders, your natural tendency may be to be very cautious with your resources, but in this simulation the only way you will find out how effective your choices are is by spending your annual allotment.

09 Years

The simulation proceeds in three time blocks representing three school years. You will advance to the second and/or third year either when you exhaust your annual budget of tokens or decide to change year. Clicking the Reflection button will enable you to reflect on the year and then, after years 1 and 2, click Change Year to move to the next year or, after year 3, click Quit for a summary of your final achievements.

10 Strategy Record
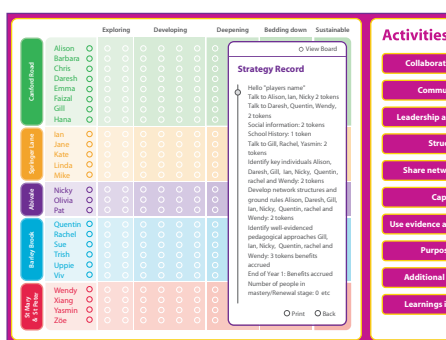
Strategy Record and pop-up

You can view your strategy at any time by clicking on the 'strategy' button. Each action you take as you play will be recorded here and you have the option to print this as required. You may also want to make your own notes as you play the simulation and to use these (along with the strategy record) to inform your future activity choices and your reflection time.

11 Reflections after Years 1, 2 and 3
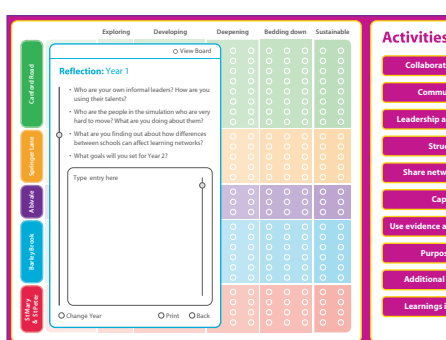
Reflections pop-up

In designing this simulation, we've tried to make it easy for you and your colleagues to use it as a planning aid. We suggest you pause after completing each of the three years of play to reflect on both the substantive ideas provoked by the way you have 'played' the simulation and feedback you've received, as well as the process you and your colleagues have used. Master copies of reflection sheets are provided in the game box and can be photocopied as required – or you can print these from the 'handouts' section. They include some questions to help focus your reflection. Also, reviewing your Strategy Record can yield useful insights about the moves you make in the remaining years of play. Alternatively, you can also type your reflections within the simulation in the space provided.

References and further resources

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Further resources

The Innovation Unit within the DfES also has think pieces and other related references www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit

NCSL has a number of resources on its website. Look especially for the Networked Learning Group pages www.ncsl.org.uk

The DfES's National Primary Strategy www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary

The Australian National Schools Network's www.nsn.net.au

The Network of Performance Based Schools in British Columbia www.npbs.ca

The NETWORK Inc. www.thenetworkinc.org

Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education www.curee-paccts.com

Creating Capacity for Learning www.louisestoll.com

Information about the creators and sponsors

The creators

David Crandall

David is President of The NETWORK Inc. and has been helping schools improve for 35 years in the US and internationally. As an outgrowth of many research and assistance projects, most notably the nationwide DESSI study that he headed in the United States, The NETWORK has developed other simulation games, including the well-known Change Game. His experience with those professional development endeavours informed the development of Networking for Learning.
www.thenetworkinc.org

Louise Stoll

Louise started her career as a primary teacher in inner London, has been working with school leaders in the UK, Canada and internationally for nearly 25 years, and is currently President of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI). She brings a deep understanding of school improvement and enhancing capacity in different school contexts to Networking for Learning. Her most recent research is a study of effective professional learning communities. She is the co-author of *It's About Learning* (and *It's About Time*).
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Innovation Unit

The Innovation Unit works with practitioners, policy makers and other organisations on innovative responses to learning-related challenges facing the education system.

We are a small team of Innovation Directors. We have all been teachers and then either become headteachers or worked in LEAs at a senior level. Some of us have also worked in Universities, the DfES, the GTC and the BBC. We're supported by a small civil service team.

Our vision is one in which professionals from all areas of education share successful developments in an accountable system where disciplined, informed innovation is the norm.

We aim to help every part of the system be confident in its ability to do this so innovation that genuinely improves teaching, raises standards and makes learning personal and powerful for every student flourishes. We see innovation as a key route to excellence and equity.

The Unit provides strategic direction to existing system-wide programmes, and to ideas in development. It seeks out and supports projects from practitioners or elsewhere that have the potential to provide strategic intelligence or widespread practical benefit for the system.

It provides opportunities for practitioners, policy-makers and other interested parties to share and develop their insights in open-source settings.

One of the Unit's activities is to manage a piece of legislation called The Power to Innovate. This is the provision whereby the Secretary of State can exempt schools, LEAs and Education Action Zones wishing to test new ideas for raising standards in education from any education legislation that is preventing them putting their ideas into practice.

Log onto our website to find out more about The Power to Innovate and other aspects of our work, as well as how to get in touch with us if you have a query or if you wish to share your innovative practice or ideas. We look forward to hearing from you.

Mike Gibbons, Maureen Burns, Anne Diack, Valerie Hannon, Deryn Harvey, Toby Salt

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National College for School Leadership (NCSL)

NCSL was formed in 2000 to provide a single national focus for school leadership development. In collaboration with Demos, the Innovation Unit, OECD, Hay Group and many others, it encourages national and international debate on leadership issues.

Through its website, online communities and research publications, NCSL acts a primary resource for school leaders. It also provides support through its leadership development programmes, ranging from opportunities for bursars to headteachers to leadership teams.

Working directly with schools, NCSL is leading on workforce remodelling, the national primary strategy and increased collaboration and networking among schools.

The cumulative goal of all these activities is to have every child in a well-led school, and every school leader committed to continuous learning.

Further copies of Networking for Learning