



time all the necessary information has been gathered, the student's working memory is full, and they have forgotten what the original question was asking.

Tablets are a wonderful introduction to classrooms. They allow for a wider variety of tasks, adaptive self-testing and reflection, collaboration with other students, real-time feedback from teachers and the availability of a wealth of resources in a fraction of the space and time. They are not however, a sole replacement for more traditional resources. If our "average student" above had a paper copy of the data booklet and had previously learnt the "principle of moments", they would only need to scroll up and down one page to obtain all the information they needed and solve the problem.

The way forward.

Like all technology, tablets in classrooms are only advantageous if used with care. We need to encourage students to work electronically, for all the advantages that holds, but show them how to reduce the load on their working memory. This means there is still a vital place for paper copies of scientific data books, literary texts, geographical maps and historical source material, at least until students' tablets are the size of a standard classroom desk. In the interim, it requires us teachers to keep a stock of paper versions in classrooms, so that we can hand them out when we see students struggling with their various electronic resources. The more practice they get where they can access the information they need successfully, the more that is committed to long-term memory and the smoother the whole process becomes.



Education Networks and Educational Flourishing

Cat Davison, Director of Service and Social Impact

'Ubuntu' is an African word used across the continent to describe a feeling of togetherness. Mbiti (1969, 125) describes the deep relationality of this view: 'I am because we are, since we are therefore I am'. Mudimbe suggests that western philosophies often take an uncontextualised 'I' as a starting point, with an 'I' being 'defined in relation to the self and its inner being, rather than in relation to others' (Mudimbe, 1988, 1).

Identification with a wider group can enhance well-being and the wider flourishing of individuals and societies. Network participation seems to satisfy Maslow's needs of belongingness and love needs, self-esteem and safety (Maslow, 1943). We can also hypothesise that networks may contribute to the domains of meaning and purpose and close social relationships offered in VanderWeele's account of human flourishing (VanderWeele, 2017).

In Social Movements, Donatella della Porta and Mari Diani (2020, 118) outline three functions of social networks:

- They enable the spread of information and opportunities amongst groups united by interest in a cause.
- They increase the likelihood of people becoming socialised towards specific values and act in support of causes.
- Contact with people in networks can generate social pressure or motivation to sustain action over time, even when challenges emerge.

This article will explore the above claims, drawing evidence and experience from two education networks I lead and participate in. EduSpots is an education network with over 300 volunteers in Ghana, Zambia and Kenya and the UK working together towards a vision of communities creating the future they want to see through education, linked to a physical network of 42 education centres. The Schools Community Action group linked to the Independent Schools Council has existed since the 1980s, bringing 80 teachers together who are united by a desire to advance the quality of our students' educational engagement and wider impact of community action.

What is a network?

It is important to distinguish the concept of 'networking' from the deep type of network engagement explored here. Networks bring groups of people together, under the umbrella of a shared goal, building impact through relationships. They differ from groups or organisations in that they often bring people together from diverse groups and locations and are distinguished from movements in that they usually offer more structured forms of engagement. Undoubtedly, groups feed into networks, and networks often form can the structure needed for social movements to gain momentum. There are an increasing number of education networks taking advantage of social media, including #EduTwitter and #WomenEd.

Types of network members

It is vital to acknowledge that 'it is the position that one occupies within a network that matters, rather than the mere fact of being involved in some kind of network.' (Porta and Diani, 2019, 119)

Drawing from my observations, firstly, we have network leaders who play a role in the strategic formation of a network. Great network leaders are often highly active participants in the network. There are also core participants: those who are actively engaged in activities and hold close relationships with other core members. Some of these may also be network activators – people with an extremely strong affinity to the overall goal, also offering the energy to strengthen the experience

of others. Most networks have floaters – people who travel along in the journey, without fully engaging – and also bystanders – those who simply observe without connecting emotionally. We might also pick out network recipients – those who are keen to draw any resource support they can from the network, without contributing. Finally, we can often identify some network cynics – individuals who sign up, but show some form of continued scepticism.

Participants often move between types of engagement, and take diverse roles within the networks they associate with. It is important for leaders to remember the multiplicity of engagement types.

What benefits emerge from membership of a network?

The benefits you draw from being part of a network will depend on the way in which you engage. The five fields below were the most commonly cited areas of value from the comments sought from the most active network participants in EduSpots and the Schools Community Action group. The evidence closely related to the three areas indicated by della Porta and Diani (2020, 118).

1. Sharing ideas and resources

"It is a chance to find diverse approaches to one single problem. You can collaborate on mutually beneficial projects. It gives an opportunity to find similarities in terms of the problem faced and responses." (Amjad Saleem, EduSpots & Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies)

Collaborative problem-solving, especially amongst diverse groups, will produce better solutions. Whilst it is important that solutions are founded upon a strong base of local understanding and leadership, taking ideas from different contexts can spark development of a more impactful solution.

Linked to this, networks joining diverse ethnic groups can also allow for the development of intercultural understanding, with one participant noting that they 'enrich our experiences and awareness of aspects of people from different parts of the world and their culture' and another referencing the value of interaction 'with people from various walks of life'. It might be otherwise difficult for individuals to gain this level of exposure if they lack the ability to leave their community, culture or social group.

Many participants referenced support with educational resources: lesson or session plans, ideas for engagement and more, alongside physical support in the form of books, IT equipment or solar power. They also valued the sharing of opportunities.

2. Shared values and motivation

'Networks help you identify with other people with whom you share values, this ultimately empowers and/or motivates you to advance those values or causes.' (Ali Eliasu, EduSpots Head of STEM)

Alongside motivation gained through identification with a shared goal, another participants noted that being part of a network also 'brings about a sense of fulfilment when set up objectives are achieved.' This suggests an increase in a sense of pleasure obtained from meeting a target due to the collective value derived from it.

'Confidence building. No handbook, specification, board or national targets in the area I/others lead in. Having a network of peers who sit in similar roles helps give confidence to adjust, tweak or share what is happening in school to achieve the best possible outcomes.' (Leighton Park Partnerships & Outreach)

Alongside building confidence, being part of a network can also ensure that you do not operate within a silo, where you only respond to feedback and values set by a narrow group of managers or leaders.

3. Resilience

"It helps to have a network of people with the same aim supporting each step of the way. Their availability alone relieves you and encourages you to try one more time." (Anita, student & EduSpots volunteer, Gomaa Manso)

Support may come in different forms, stretching from educational resources to emotional support. Leading any form of change can be challenging, with most people and communities resistant to change and many people unwilling to join a mission until there are signs of success. Being part of a group focused on similar aims can give you the courage to take stock, and try again – certainly, I sustain my own motivation through connecting with network members acting in alignment with established network values and goals, with the EduSpots WhatsApp feeds offering a continuous feed for sharing action.

Conclusion

Returning to the notion of 'ubuntu', perhaps this one comment is key: 'It satisfies our need of belongingness.' In addition to a powerful sense of shared existence and purpose that networks can bring, it is impossible to progress any educational idea of practical value for society without committing yourself to some form of collaborative engagement. My educational understanding, well-being and impact has been transformed through network engagement and creation – I would encourage all teachers to look beyond their immediate departments to wider educational and, ultimately, societal spaces.

