


Creating and running successful online groups for teacher development

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Contents

1. Introduction	05
2. Starting a group: Doing your homework	09
3. Choosing technologies	18
4. Establishing your group	22
5. Running your group	29
6. References	41



Part 1

Introduction

This toolkit draws on various sources and resources, including:

1. A research study conducted between January and February 2021 (Motteram, 2024)
2. Insights from other related research projects
3. Ideas from existing literature on running online communities, particularly in the context of distance learning, where the concepts of social presence and communities of practice have long been debated
4. Resources from the British Council and other relevant organisations.

What we learned from our research study

Online teachers' groups can be very different, but the findings in the research show four general types:

1. A group set up as a part of a project and training that is mostly used for information exchange
2. A community, often linked to a teacher association, or a particular region where information and ideas are exchanged, but where there is also a strong social element
3. A group that is designed more specifically for teacher development of various kinds

and alongside the information exchange there are specific training sessions, often at regular times during the week (see also TAGs below)

4. A smaller group that comes together to work on specific issues that relate to very local contexts.

Many of these groups run as an adjunct to face-to-face activity, but some only run online. Ones that run online have the possibility of reaching teachers who would not normally be able to access any form of training or development. All the groups have a value if they support teachers and help develop their resilience, and also if they develop their skills, or provide them with useful information and ultimately improve their students' learning outcomes.

Evidence from the research study that accompanies this toolkit suggests that these groups play an important role in supporting teachers, both practically as well as psychologically, and there is some evidence (although currently limited) that they support children's learning outcomes. Key points to keep in mind are:

- The majority of teachers who are members of the groups are happy to be members. They believe there is a positive value to being part of the group.
- Teachers do use what they learn from the groups in their classes and are often happy

to talk to the group about the successes they have had.

- Teachers are often members of multiple groups and share ideas across the different groups.
- Tools they use can vary, but there are tools that are more popular; the choice of tools is often regional- or country-based.
- People don't post, not because they are not interested, but because they lack time, and, in some cases, can't afford internet access. Sometimes it is because no one acknowledges their posts.

Different kinds of groups

In the end, it isn't important what label you apply to your group, but it is worth knowing more about what to expect from different types of groups and the amount of work needed to keep groups active. It is certainly a good idea to go through a process of deciding what you are trying to achieve and to explain what you are and what you are not to people who want to join after the group has been initially established. Make sure you repeat the process of reminding people of the nature of the group and asking the community if they are still happy with how it is working on a regular basis. Groups can, of course, change over time, but it is important for people who are members to be involved in the ongoing decision-making process.

Communities of Practice (CoPs)

This is a term that is often applied to any group, but it is useful to make the distinction between this and other groups. Key features of a Community of Practice (CoP) (Wenger-Trayner, 2015) are that the group has a shared interest in a topic or skill and wants to learn more about it or how to do it better. The group will only last if the interest is maintained and members interact regularly. It may be that the group is

maintained by addressing a number of different questions over a period of time, or it can be maintained by one key interest where understanding of the topic changes over time.

CoPs have been used in teacher development in various ways and may be a combination of face-to-face and online activity. However, here we are also concerned with groups that may never have met, particularly when an online group is international.

Teacher Activity Groups (TAGs)

This is the term used to describe formally constituted Communities of Practice: 'TAGs were ... recognised by the state education department and incorporated into a formal large-scale CPD project.' Borg et al. (2020, p. 7). Teachers are considered more likely to engage in such groups if they are seen as being a part of a recognised system of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). TAGs are not, however, conventional classroom-based CPD; they maintain their link to the essential features of a CoP in that they are group-based and are social. Key features are:

- 'sustained activity over time (face-to-face and/or online)
- opportunities for teachers to learn together (collaborative CPD)
- opportunities for teachers to learn from one another (teachers as a source of expertise)
- dynamic content that is defined by teachers' classroom contexts (localisation and immediate relevance)
- sharing and interaction as key teacher-learning processes
- positive group dynamics – trust, openness and a non-judgemental environment
- classroom inquiry and reflection (cyclical links between TAGs and teaching).'
(Borg et al., 2020, p. 24)



What do you think?

1. What sort of group is closest to the idea you have in mind? Will it be purely an online group, or will it run alongside face-to-face activity? Why do you think this group would work for you?

2. Why are you setting this group up? What are you trying to achieve? Do you have a clear sense of its purposes? What could be the advantages/disadvantages and challenges? It would be useful for you to lay out some of your thinking below and then talk about this with other people who are going to be participants in the group. Establish an initial committee (see the following section).



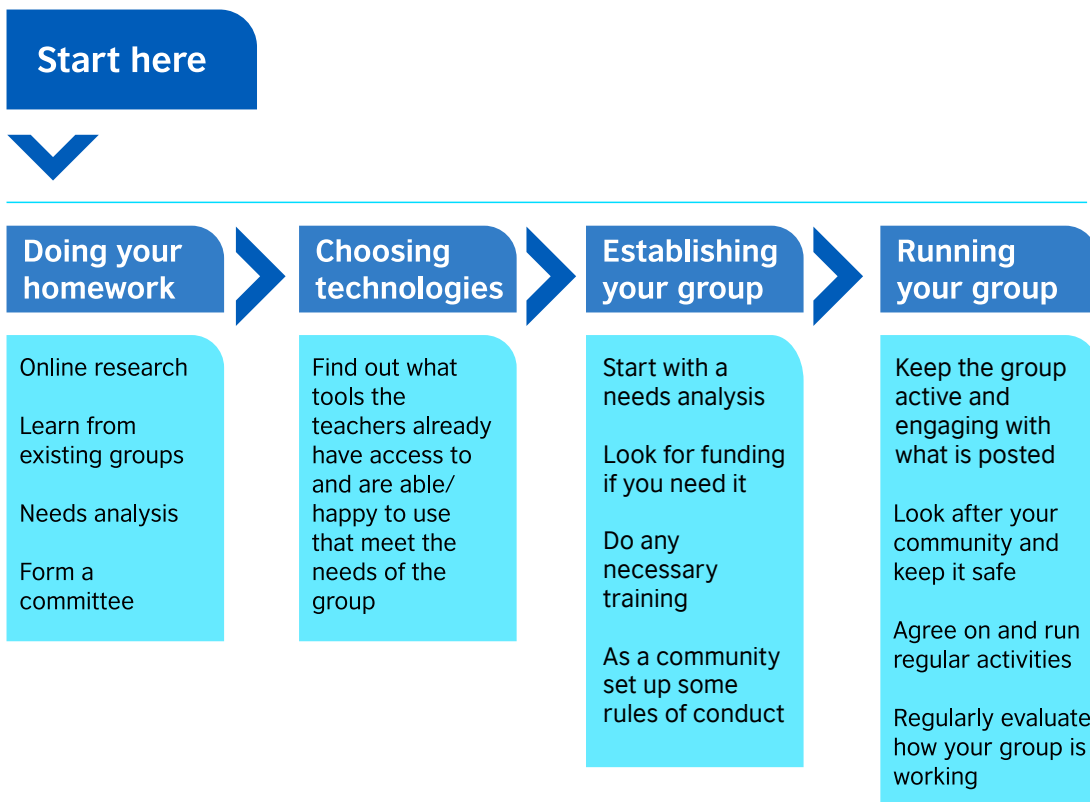


Part 2

Starting a group: Doing your homework

This section considers the steps to take when starting a group. The flowchart below shows the key stages in setting up and running a group. Here we address the first stage: *Doing your homework*.

Flow chart of how to set up and run a group



Starting a group

First of all, you need to decide on the type of group you are interested in running. It may end up being a combination of elements of different types of groups. Think also about what size you want it to be. This might be conditioned by tools, but also by what you are trying to achieve and the nature of the group.

You should then start by exploring the internet to find out about existing groups and what they do. You could contact people who run those groups, and/or join them, to get some insights into how they run (see below for more detail on this part of the process).

Start by forming a small 'committee' of people who are interested in running the group.

Keeping the group active is a big ask for one or two people, so having an active committee will help make the group more likely to be successful. This committee could also be responsible for the needs analysis, or if a needs analysis has already been conducted in advance, then the results can be shared with the committee and work agreed on.

These are some questions you could discuss with the committee and then use them as the basis for further exploration in the process of setting up the group.

Initial needs analysis

Before you begin the process of forming a group, you may want to conduct a needs analysis amongst the community of teachers who you are hoping to work with. You should also regularly test your initial assumptions about the needs of the group to see if they are being met, or need updating (see more below).

Assuming you are already connected to groups of teachers in your region, or country via ministries of education, teacher associations, etc., you could go through the following process of establishing need, or simply talk to colleagues in local schools. What follows is a comprehensive process, but you don't have to do it all.

You may have your own ideas, but it is useful to test these out. You could start with interviews with key people, and/or run focus groups with teachers you know. Interviews and focus groups usually make use of a protocol that is semi-structured, i.e. you have a framework of questions, but if interesting ideas are mentioned during the process of the interview or focus group, you can follow these up. It is often the case that questions you have later in your schedule are answered earlier, so these can be omitted.

1. What do you see as the aims of this online group?
2. How big do you think the group should be?
3. What sorts of activities do you think should happen in the group?
4. Do you think we should have a weekly training session? If so, what day of the week would work best? Would you be prepared to offer a session?
5. What platforms do you think we should use to run the group (remember we want to make this available to as many people as possible)?
6. Would you be interested in being part of the administrative team for the group?



Questions for interviews and focus groups

Interviews or focus groups with leaders of the profession could include:

Demographic questions

- How many teachers overall are there in x?
- What are the percentages of male/female teachers?
- How are teachers distributed in the region/country? What percentages of teachers work in urban/rural contexts?
- What qualifications do teachers need to start training?
- How are teachers trained before they start work?

Specific needs questions

- Do teachers have access to existing training/development opportunities already? How are these run? How often do they occur?
- What areas of training/development are most needed?
- Are there any specific issues to keep in mind for meeting the needs of female teachers?

Ways of working

- How has training been conducted in the past?
- We are planning to create an online community. Do you have any experiences of doing this? Do you have any advice to offer us?
- What are common tools that teachers use to communicate with each other. Do you think using technology will be an advantage for female teachers?

Additional questions for teachers might focus on:

- What topics do you think would be most interesting/useful for you and other teachers?
- Are there particular considerations that need to be taken into account for meeting the needs of female teachers?
- What do you think might be some of the barriers to making this work? Costs/Time/Levels of digital literacy?
- What technology platforms would be most suitable?

Conducting interviews and focus groups

General advice for conducting an interview or a focus group:

- You should get agreement in advance that the participants are happy to talk to you.
- Reassure them at the beginning of the process that you will keep the information safe and won't reveal personal data. Also, tell them what you plan to do with the original recording once you have processed it.
- Agree a time and a place that suits the participants, as far as possible.
- If you are going to talk to people in person, select a space that you feel safe in. If possible, select a neutral space.
- Start the conversation with general material to settle the participant(s) in.
- Don't go on longer than you have agreed.
- Make sure you destroy original recordings if this what you said you would do.

Specifics for conducting a focus group:

- A focus group is usually run with a small group of between five to ten people. You can use similar questions to the survey.
- If the focus group is run online and you don't have access to tools like Zoom, or people don't have good internet connectivity, focus groups can be conducted on WhatsApp or Telegram.
- The advantage of focus groups (and interviews) is you can use the initial questions to get the conversation going and if an interesting point is made, you can pursue this for a while, before coming back to your questions. Ideas might come up as you talk that you hadn't thought of and again, you can get further clarification.

Analysing your data

A thematic analysis is a common way of analysing textual data in formal research. This essentially means reading through, or listening to your interviews, or other textual material you have collected (your data) to see what common issues are occurring. You may also want to count how often a topic occurs and/or group them together (to create overarching themes). You don't need to conduct a full thematic analysis unless you are conducting formal research, but try to be as systematic as you can.

For a very quick overview of thematic analysis in more formal research see [How to Do Thematic Analysis | Step-by-Step Guide & Examples](#). What you learn from the findings in initial interviews, or focus groups, can help you when you create a questionnaire that you can distribute more widely amongst your target community. It can also help you when you conduct an evaluation.

A more informal process could start with some background searching/reading on the internet, perhaps joining one or two existing teacher

groups to observe what they do. Talk to a few people who seem to have established the kind of group that you are interested in, and which

look successful. Then use this information to create a questionnaire to send out to the wider community.



What do you think?

What did you learn from your needs analysis?

Learning from existing groups

If you have not experienced an online group, it is a good idea to join one and become part of it for a while. This will give you the experience of being a member of a group and you will get to experience what it is like as a member, as well as learn how groups operate. From this, you might decide that there are certain types of activities that you think are more valuable and certain types that you believe are more effective and not so effective. You will experience the volume of traffic of messages in a large active group and this will make you think about how you might manage traffic in your own group. If you are setting the group up as a

community, then different members of the steering group could become part of different online communities and report back.

The main way to find groups is to reach out via your local communities, particularly through contacts in teacher associations, either local or international ones. Groups are generally closed, so you will need to approach the group moderators.

Here are some questions you could ask when you join the group. You could find out some of this by observing, but also by interviewing one of the group administrators.



Questions to ask about a group

- What is the aim of the group? Do you think it is fulfilling this aim?

- What particular tasks did you think worked best with the group?

- How frequently was there interaction in the group?

- Did you feel this was enough or too much, etc.?

- What do you think of the platform used? Did it work for what the group aimed to do?



Example groups

A small, locally-focused group

The World in your Classroom

The Guinea Bissau WhatsApp group has been running since May 2018 and at the time of writing had 86 members. It was set up around the English language teacher association and was started following an initial face-to-face meeting at TESOL Africa between Linda Ruas and Ali Djau, in Senegal in 2018.

The group has run a variety of activities since 2018, e.g., discussions, quizzes and presentations about teaching. Discussions have included topics like fake news, coronavirus and inequality, racism, sexism, using stories in class, teaching vocabulary, teaching students with disabilities, error correction, idioms, etc. Discussions around gender have featured quite significantly. The teachers have worked together to share ideas for lesson material or have created lesson plans together. It was suggested that the teachers prefer the topical discussions rather than ones that focus on teaching methodology. These discussions, however, often lead into debate about how these ideas could be developed into lessons.

Activities are organised on a community basis and originally were set up to run from Saturday to Tuesday.

The group has now set up a website: [English Language Teachers' Association – Guinea Bissau \(ELTA-GB\)](#) where materials are being stored and can be accessed.

A small group linked to a specific regional course

WhatsApp use in the British Council in Egypt and Palestine

Here, WhatsApp is used as a way of communicating with client groups who are attending face-to-face teacher development groups. It is used by the course managers to keep in touch with the local trainers. Information about courses or pre-session tasks are sent out in advance of sessions and then distributed to the course participants by the local trainers. The local trainers also use their own WhatsApp groups to keep in more regular touch with the local course participants. They may also use the group to collect information or feedback about sessions.

A Teacher Activity Group (TAG)

Teacher development course in India

Teachers are organised according to their geographical clusters; they meet face-to-face and are part of a WhatsApp group. Between physical meetings, teachers are encouraged to share what they tried in their classrooms, their reflections and challenges. This group is managed by a TAG facilitator who organises the face-to-face meetings as well.

A large online group

British Council Teacher Community on Facebook

This is a general Facebook group that anyone can join, although it is private, and access is controlled. It is also actively monitored and has a number of administrators and moderators. It was originally created in 2015 and has over 700,000 members (November, 2022).

The group has an active discussion stream where teachers can post questions about topics where they need help, or give ideas based on the work they are doing with their learners. People also advertise sessions. There is also an announcement stream.



What do you think?

What did you learn from getting to know other groups?

Ongoing monitoring

While a needs analysis should be conducted at the beginning of setting up a community, it is important to periodically assess the health of

the group. See the section below – Evaluating your group – for some additional ideas.



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Part 3

Choosing technologies

When deciding which technology to use, it is important to consider what is available and what teachers are familiar with (Trucano, 2013). Encouraging people to move away from a technology they are accustomed to, and often use daily for other purposes, can be counterproductive. This shift is likely to affect the sustainability of the group.

The tool that you make use of might not be ideal, but you may have to accept it to get the group going. Over time you may be able to move to different tools, or add new tools to serve different functions.

Whatever tool you pick, some people may be excluded. The choice of tool will also depend on what you want to do with it, what sorts of activities the group is going to engage in and what the local limitations on access are.

Communication tools

In a number of recent surveys that have been conducted, including our own, the tools that are most commonly mentioned are instant messaging communication tools like WhatsApp, or Telegram, with WhatsApp being the most mentioned. Other commonly used tools are Facebook (and Messenger) and YouTube (most likely for the storage of materials related to the group). Sixty-four percent of the people who

replied to our survey (Motteram, 2024) lived in a city and many of the respondents came from countries like India, or regions like sub-Saharan Africa where WhatsApp dominates. However, there are many other tools that are used regionally, and it is important to keep this in mind. The key point is to find out what your potential members are already using as a part of your initial needs analysis.

The communication tools form the core of a community, are usually the starting point and keep the community going. However, they do have downsides:

- People with limited access to data may not be able to keep up with large numbers of messages on an active group.
- It is difficult to keep track of the threads of a discussion, or people may not even notice that a discussion has occurred.
- People may post messages that are not relevant to the group.
- People do not react to posts that are made and so members become dissatisfied.
- People may not feel confident to post.

Some of these issues can be resolved by the recording and archiving of interesting materials, by reminding people about when and when not to post and what materials are acceptable and what are not. Offering a session

on what and how to post can give confidence to community members and is a way of solving some of these issues. Developing people’s digital literacy is an important part of making sure that groups are successful and inclusive.

It is clear that the population of groups will change over time and that agreed standards of practice will need to be revisited quite regularly (see Part 5).

Table 1 highlights the features of common communication tools used worldwide, revealing that they are mostly very similar. A notable difference among these tools is the size of the groups they support and the types of calling facilities they offer. The effectiveness of group

size depends on the context: larger groups tend to become spaces for announcements and information delivery, making it less likely to foster a solution-oriented learning community. Smaller groups are more conducive to the problem-solving nature of CoPs and TAGs.

Features of communication tools

An important consideration is what features different tools offer for teacher development. Most communication tools offer text and pictures and the majority allow audio posts. This allows for people to post in ways that they feel most comfortable with.

Useful characteristics for teacher development	WhatsApp	Telegram	WeChat	Viber	Facebook Messenger
Can post text messages including emoticons and emojis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Can post audio messages	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Can post documents of various types	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Can post video	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Can export discussions	✓	✓	No	Difficult	No
Can provide audio and video calls	Max 32	✓ – Up to 1000 can participate in a video call, but with only 30 people who are able to use video	Max nine	No limit mentioned, although 20 has been suggested as a maximum	Max 50
Number of members in a group	1024	200,000	500	Not mentioned, but assumed to be unlimited	250
End to end encryption	Yes, as standard	Has to be set up	No	✓	No

Table 1 Features of common communication tools

Other social media

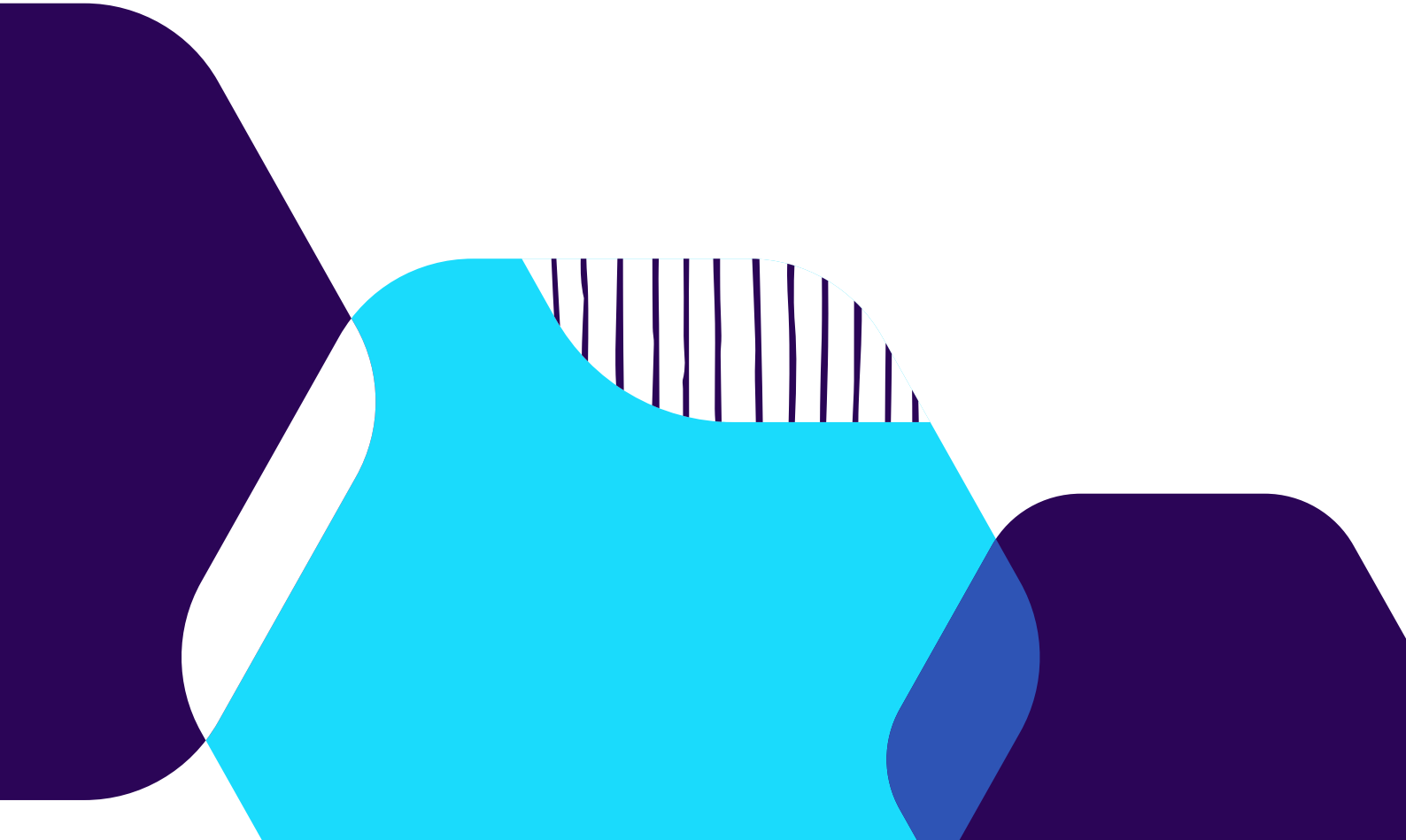
Facebook is still a very commonly used tool and has a range of features that make it a good choice for a community of practice, or an addition to a TAG. People can also use Pages on Facebook, but these are much more about delivering information.

- Any Facebook member can create a group.
- Groups can be open or closed, so membership can be controlled if required.
- You can create events, upload materials of various types and share files.
- You can group different postings together using hashtags.
- If you want, you can make a group private and not searchable.
- Facebook groups can be very large, if you want them to be.

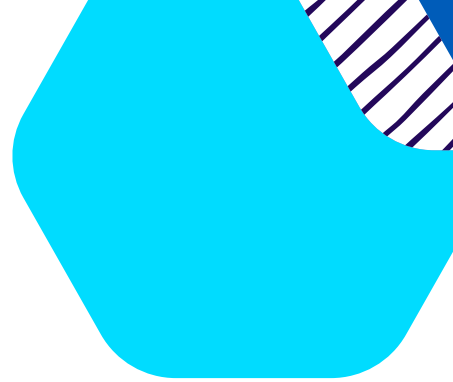


What do you think?

What do you think might be the most useful tool for your group and why?







Part 4

Establishing your group

Needs analysis

People will have a range of experiences and skills when it comes to using technology, so revisiting your group's needs analysis or undertaking one specifically about the tools you have chosen, and the community's general digital literacy is a good idea.

A useful introduction to digital literacy can be found here: [Digital literacies: What are they and why should we care?](#) and includes this definition, 'digital literacies refer to our ability to effectively make use of the technologies at our disposal'. The materials point out that we are not simply concerned here with the ability to

use certain tools, but also with how we project ourselves online and connect with others, or how we understand how we protect what we publish through mechanisms like Creative Commons. You could then test yourself about the topic by looking here: [What is digital literacy?](#)

Do any necessary training

When you have determined the needs of your group, providing training sessions, or giving people links to online guides on what might be perceived as basic internet skills and regularly used tools, is a good first step.



Photo © Mat Wright

Ideas for training

How to search on Google	On the following page, there are two example activities on how to search using Google that were created for groups in India.
How to use WhatsApp	Here is a link to a very basic introduction to WhatsApp: Using WhatsApp: a quick guide Learning Disability England
How to use Facebook	This is a basic introduction to Facebook and its features and how to sign up: How to Use Facebook: A Beginner's Guide . Here is a YouTube video that covers similar ground: How to Use Facebook - Complete Beginner's Guide
How to use Zoom	This is a basic overview of using Zoom: Introduction to Zoom meetings Digital Unite



EDGE WhatsApp club

Digital skills Activity 18



1. You want to find out dates for Holi festival in 2021. For best results, what would you type in Google search?

2021 में होली की तारीख के बारे में जानने के लिए आप Google search में क्या टाइप करेंगे?

- a. I want to know Holi dates for 2021
- b. Holi dates 2021 answer: b
- c. What are the Holi dates for 2021?

2. You want to find out about important dishes people eat during Christmas ख़यज़न जो लोग क्रिसमस के दौरान खाते हैं. For best results, what would you type in Google search?

- a. What to eat during Christmas?
- b. Food for Christmas answer: c
- c. Important dishes Christmas

Type your answers in the group chat before 7 pm today.

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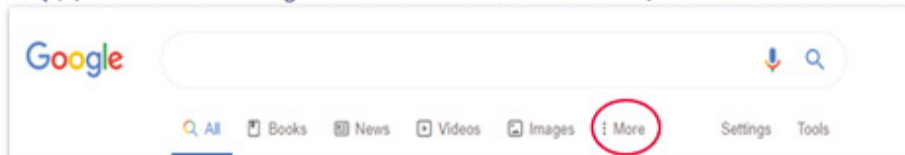


EDGE WhatsApp club

Digital skills Activity 13



You can find anything using Google search. Let's learn how to use it on our phones to find things faster. आइए हम अपने फ़ोन पर Google खोज का उपयोग करना सीखें ताकि हमें तेज़ी से चीज़ों को खोज सके।



1. Type in the bar what you want to search for. उस पट्टी में टाइप करें जिसे आप खोजना चाहते हैं।
2. Select from the different options by clicking on More. More पर क्लिक करके विभिन्न विकल्पों में से चुनें।
3. Clicking on the More icon helps simplify our search results on Google. More आइकन पर क्लिक करने से Google पर हमारे खोज परिणामों को आसान बनाने में मदद मिलती है।
4. Now you can see results based on the mode you chose (books, news, videos, etc.) अब आप अपने द्वारा चुने गए मोड (पुस्तकों, समाचार, वीडियो, आदि) के आधार पर परिणाम देख सकते हैं।

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Technology from the perspective of the community managers or administrators

There are a number of features of typical communication tools like WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger and Vyber that make them useful for running online synchronous sessions, as well as for keeping in touch with the group asynchronously:

- They are low bandwidth and can be used on a number of devices.
- You can make use of different multimedia elements: text, pre-made documents, pictures, audio and video.
- You can save the text from a session.
- People can catch up with a session later and still make comments.

Here is a short introduction to using WhatsApp for language teaching, but it covers the ground that you would want to cover in a teacher development session:

[Teaching with Whatsapp](#)

Facebook can be used in similar ways to messaging tools and a closed Facebook group is the most convenient way for teachers to make use of this tool. However, Facebook is relatively data hungry because media is automatically downloaded when you open the app, whereas with tools like WhatsApp, you can choose not to download pictures, video, or audio.

Here are two introductions to setting up groups. The early parts go through the basic details:

1. [How to Create a Facebook Group \(and Build an Engaged Community\)](#)
2. [How To Start A Facebook Group And Get Loyal Fans](#)

While messaging tools are really useful when there is very low bandwidth, if your teachers

can access a video conferencing tool like Zoom, Google Meet, Teams or Skype, this will broaden the scope of what you can do.

- Here is a link introducing Zoom for teachers: [Zoom 101 for Teachers](#)
- This is a similar tutorial from the same website for Google Meet: [Google Meet 101 for Teachers](#)

The pandemic showed us that it was possible to run our lives asynchronously online, but this had some disadvantages. Being able to meet synchronously is an important part of making online training successful.

Other optional tools

These are additional tools that you might consider using with your community, particularly if you are offering different forms of training, or development sessions.

Padlet is essentially an online whiteboard/blackboard, which allows many people to interact with it at the same time. It's a good space for having discussions as a class or in small groups and it can also be used for presenting materials to a group. It is mostly used for text, pictures and internet links, but you can create audio or video files on the platform.

Here are two different introductions to Padlet. The first is quite short and takes you through the basics of set up: [Padlet Tutorial - How to Get Started Guide](#). The [second one](#) also takes you through the basics, but then goes on to give examples of how to use Padlet in the classroom, which you may also be interested in.

Polls in online sessions can be helpful in a number of ways. They can be used to ask questions before a session to get participants thinking, or as a needs analysis. They can be used while a session is running to check if people are following a topic, or at the end to find out how the session went. Tools like Zoom have polls built in, but there are also apps like [Mentimeter](#) or [Socrative](#). Polls can also be

created in tools like Google or Microsoft Forms. These are very powerful tools with lots of features.

From here we are getting to the point where a number of skills are required that go beyond the basics of using technology in teaching communities. Of course, most of us record short videos for personal use on a regular basis and upload them to tools like Facebook and WhatsApp. However, if you want to be more effective, trying to get some help in the early stages of creating video or audio is a good idea.

If you want to create a video for training, the tools you use will partly depend on what we mean by video. A very quick way of filming basic training videos is to create them in a tool like Zoom where you can bring together different resources and other people and record the activity. You can also record online sessions of someone else giving a presentation. You will need a space to store these and the obvious one for most people is YouTube. You can also store videos on Google Drive or Dropbox. On YouTube you can set up and run a live session, which is automatically recorded.

If, by video you mean a collection of pictures that are linked together with text and commentary, you could explore Adobe Spark, where you can upload a range of types of pictures. You can also use Adobe Spark to put short videos together with pictures and text.

Any modern phone is capable of recording video clips, which you could connect together into one longer video.

Another type of video is animated materials and an easy-to-use tool here is Powtoon. This allows you to put together different animated elements with sound and text to tell stories, or create training material.

All of these tools have free and paid-for versions and inevitably what you can do in the free versions is quite limited.

A podcast is an audio file, like a radio programme, but played on the internet. Audio has always been an important part of language learning and has been used a lot in education. Radio itself is still an important channel for education in the world.

It is again possible to create an audio broadcast using a tool like Zoom and taking the audio track that is automatically stored. You can also record using independent audio tools like Audacity and you can edit the files there. Podomatic, which is a well known podcast delivery platform allows you to record and edit directly on their site.

Here is a short introduction and guidelines for using podcasts in language teaching, but the ideas are equally adaptable for teacher training/development: [Tech Tools for Teachers: Podcasting](#)

If you want to learn a lot about a whole range of different tools, you could look here: [Teacher Training Videos](#).



What do you think?

What do you think might be the training priorities for your group? How will you find out?

Keeping yourself and online teacher community safe

When you make use of messaging, communication or other tools on the internet it is very likely, as a minimum, that they collect data from you. This data is usually used to target advertising at you or your community so that companies can make money. This is the way that companies argue that they can provide you with these services for free.

Messaging systems that include 'end to end encryption' are preferred to ones that don't. This helps to protect who sees the messages you send. Table 1 in Part 3 shows that only WhatsApp provides this feature as a standard option. If it is offered in other tools, then use it. However, WhatsApp still shares data with its parent company, Facebook, so in many ways it is really no 'safer' than other tools.

Look for funding if you need it

It may be possible to get some initial funding to help set up your group. Perhaps a group of schools would see the benefit of bringing teachers together and offer premises, facilities, and perhaps pay for some refreshments to organise a start-up meeting, or an occasional event.

The local education authorities may also be persuaded that this is a good idea and provide administrative support, or again funding.

If there are any local British Council staff or Regional English Language Officers from the US Embassy, they may also be to offer some support.

Larger regional or international teacher organisations, like Africa ELTA, IATEFL or TESOL International might also be able to support events that facilitate the start up of such activities.

Keeping safe online

When you are online, share as little personal data as you possibly can:

- Don't give out phone numbers, date of birth, or your home address unless this is essential for the service you are signing up to. If you are buying something online, the company will need your home address to send you what you are buying, otherwise don't give out those details. If a phone number is optional, don't give it, use an email address where possible.
- Never give out personal details on a messaging group.
- Don't sign up for new online services using existing online services. Don't log in to a site using your Facebook, or Google account. The new service will harvest your contact details. Even if you don't use it for communication, it is a good idea to have an email address just for logging into different online services.
- Avoid using the same password for different sites. Try to pick passwords that are more secure, so ones that have a mixture of letters, numbers and symbols and which mix upper- and lower-case letters. If you have trouble remembering passwords, you can write them down on a piece of paper. No one can hack this online.



Part 5

Running your group

Community guidelines and setting expectations

At the beginning of setting up a group, and on a regular basis after that, it is important that there is an agreed set of guidelines on what should be posted and how often. It should be made clear that if people don't adhere to these guidelines, they will be removed from the group.

Typical issues that come up in a group include:

- Inappropriate posts like adverts, or posts in different languages
- People asking lots of specific questions about language
- How often people should post and when
- Responding to others' posts, showing a respect for posts
- Length of posts.

All of the group members should be encouraged to be active participants, keeping in mind that teachers are usually time poor. If someone mentions that they have done something interesting in their classes recently, they could be asked to do a presentation about this. People should also be encouraged to engage with what is happening on the screen and comment on postings that they see as important and relevant, and also comment on

ones that they don't agree with. Debate is healthy for a group and the more people that can be kept involved, the better.

If you want to see this in action, the British Council Teacher Community under Topics has a hashtag #CodeOfConduct where you can see relevant postings for that group.

Here is an example from a TAG in India. This set of rules reflects the ideas of that specific group and shouldn't be seen as prescriptive.



*This group is for your **professional development** and to help grow our **understanding and knowledge of teaching, learning and education**. Please follow these guidelines to help make discussions on this group relevant and useful.*

- Post messages/information about English Language Teaching only.
- Send short and easy to read messages. Post links to messages if they are too long.
- Read posts carefully and comment appropriately.
- While posting videos or links, write a short description or summary about the content.
- Ask questions to engage others.
- Respect others' ideas and opinions even if they are different from yours.
- Don't send personal messages such as 'Happy Birthday', 'good morning/night' on this group ☺.
- Be active on the group!

Keep the group active

A key concern about any kind of learning community is the apparent lack of engagement by some participants. Individuals who do not actively participate in a community are sometimes referred to as 'lurkers'. Bozkurt et al. (2020) provide insights into how people defined as 'lurkers' might engage with the online world:

- Lurkers are invisible, silent learners on the periphery of networks.
- Transactional distance can take multiple forms.
- Lurkers prefer vicarious interaction.
- A combination of internal and external factors can lead learners to lurk.

These are important considerations for people setting up and running online communities. There will be lurkers, but that does not mean that they are not an important part of the community. They may be engaging with the materials and activities that are a part of the community, but they are not willing to overtly participate. There may be a host of reasons for this which might be personal reasons or features of their circumstances.

E-moderating

The term *e-moderating* is used to describe the process of managing an online group, or managing distancing learning (where the term originated). There are guidelines people should follow to try and make a community work and be productive. The role is an important one and includes activities like welcoming people to a group, or getting people to know each other, checking people know how to post, offering

training and so on. The e-moderator(s) can encourage activity by making comments on other people's posts, particularly when no one else has commented. A common complaint about groups is that there were no comments on posts that people made and they were then discouraged from posting again. It would be sensible to have more than one e-moderator so the work doesn't all fall onto one person.

A very well-known model of e-moderating is that of Gilly Salmon (see Table 2). This model is used a lot for thinking about online learning, but could be equally applied to running an online community. It outlines a process of getting people on board with the technology and encouraging and welcoming them; getting them to exchange with each other in genuine ways; developing a sense of community; and only then beginning to engage in exchanging information and knowledge construction. Although this process is represented as a set of steps, it should be seen as iterative, particularly when you have an online community with a changing population where onboarding and socialising need to be carried out on a regular basis.



Stage	Technical support	E-moderating
1. Access and motivation	Getting people access to the system and setting up	Welcoming and getting to know people; giving people support
2. Online socialisation	Learning how the different parts of the system works by posting and replying to other messages	Using strategies to form the group and encourage social engagement. Beginning to establish presence
3. Information exchange	Finding your way about the material and engaging with and sharing your ideas	Supporting the learning process, giving additional explanations of the materials, setting appropriate tasks
4. Knowledge construction	Exploring more advanced features of the different tools. Adding your own materials and engaging with others	Providing support and feedback
5. Development	Looking at ways of extending the system, or finding ways of developing the growing knowledge base. Providing links to the outside	Providing support, but moving out of the way to let the learners do their own work

Table 2 Gilly Salmon’s five-stage-model of e-moderating (adapted)

You can find out more information on Gilly Salmon’s model on her website: [E-moderating - Gilly Salmon](#)

A useful set of guidelines that might help to manage your groups can be found in a British

Council publication on [Remote teaching tips](#), which includes guidance on topics like moderation. Other advice on moderation can be found here: [How to Moderate an Online Group](#).



What do you think?

What do you need to do to get started?

Agree on and run regular activities

The activities that you engage in will depend a lot on the nature of the group.

Groups where the main aim is to provide information, or offer services

An example group on Facebook that you might find useful, both to see how it works and because it is relevant to this toolkit, is the Remote Teaching group. A typical group has discussions and advertises events. Access to postings is via grouping using hashtags. You can also see who else is a member. Discussions in groups of this type are often quite short, but could be extended with additional e-moderating.

Groups where the main aim is to support ongoing face-to-face courses

Groups of this type are often set up after an initial meeting and some of the processes that are described above can be established face-to-face, e.g., agreeing ways of working and appointing willing moderators, making sure the moderating team reflects the demographics of the community.

The needs analysis for such a group will have been established by the course design team, which may have included discussion of the aims of an online group.

Typical postings would include:

- Posting of information about future training sessions
- Arranging online meetings
- Forwarding study documents or links to online resources
- Setting tasks for online or face-to-face training sessions
- Collecting feedback from events.

If face-to-face meetings are a small part of the ongoing programme, activities from the next section would also be relevant.

Groups where the main aim is to engage in online teacher development activities

The research report that accompanies this toolkit provided us with information about typical activities that teacher groups engage in online.



New Ways of Teaching: Skills and CPD for Teachers

About the webinar

www.teachingenglish.org.uk

You might be interested in listening to Harry Kuchah and Wendy Arnold discuss the results of a research project which has global implications on what skills teachers need to be able to connect with their students when they cannot have face to face classes

Register early so you can attend and ask questions ... the report will also be available to download shortly

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/new-ways-teaching-skills-cpd-teachers>

23:20



Final celebration and team presentations

The original plan for the end of the project (pre-pandemic) was to hold a conference in Abidjan where teachers, mentors
tateproject.wordpress.com

The Dabou Teacher researcher Project by Inspectors Appia and Fofana: Exploring classroom issues to improve practices. A team of the University of Manchester and the DPFC conducted a project with a group of teachers in Dabou. Here are the final reports.

<https://tateproject.wordpress.com/2021/05/12/final-celebration-and-team-presentations/>

08:07

Information exchange – One of the balances that needs to be struck when sharing information is to make sure that the information is relevant to the group, but to not dissuade people from posting at all. So, information about up-and-coming teaching events and links to relevant websites are to be encouraged, but not advertising, or posts that are not at all connected to teaching.

Sharing resources – Lots of resources get shared, like summaries of online sessions, teaching materials like lesson plans, links to

useful newly discovered online resources, useful apps, examination materials, but sometimes also books that are copyright and this should be controlled. People should be reminded that they need permission to share such materials.



Examples of activities

Lesson plan

This lesson plan was created following a discussion on the Guinea Bissau WhatsApp group.

ESA lesson plan 'Women in Parliament' – 40 mins

- Objectives:
- For learners to develop reading skills of skimming and reading for detail
 - For learners to learn five new items of vocabulary related to government/women
 - For learners to discuss and learn about how to solve problems with gender bias/government

1/ E - Engage

5 mins

Teacher ask these questions – learners to discuss in small groups:
Would you like a woman president?
Which countries have women leaders?
Would you like all women in government?
How would the government be different with more women making decisions?
Brief whole class feedback.

2/ S - Study

10 mins

a. Teach vocabulary items by eliciting, drilling, checking and boarding, or translating/matching: *candidate, quota, discrimination, equal, activist*

5 mins

b. Learners predict content of text in pairs for one minute – from vocabulary

10 mins

c. Hand out text and set one-minute skimming task – 'Is this good or bad news?' Share.

d. Read through again to find what the good news is.

TEXT

Text: Guinea-Bissau Parliament passes law to ensure gender-balanced political representation
Copy sheet – hand out to students

3/ A - Activate

10 mins

In groups of three, make a plan to involve women more at all levels of decision-making in Guinea Bissau:

- What will you do?
- When?
- How?
- With who?
- Why?

Selected groups briefly present their plan to the class

Text for students to read:

2 Aug 2018 GUINEA-BISSAU PARLIAMENT PASSES LAW TO ENSURE GENDER BALANCED POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The law was unanimously voted by the 81 MPs present. The National Assembly (ANP) thus concluded two days of discussion under the leadership of the Chair of the Specialized Commission for Women and Children, Ms. Martina Moniz.

The Quotas Law will only come into force 60 days after promulgation by the President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau. Before being submitted to the Head of State, it will still be reviewed by the specialized committees of the Parliament and revalidated by the plenary in September. It should enter into force before the next legislative elections, on November 18.

The United Nations in Guinea-Bissau and partners have already developed a robust training and support plan for women activists and potential women candidates for the upcoming elections. Guinea-Bissau is now part of a group of more than 80 countries that have taken corrective and temporary measures to advance women's participation in politics and decision-making.

According to United Nations reports, in countries where quota laws exist, the average representation of women is 25 per cent, while for countries where they do not exist, the average is only 19 per cent. As stipulated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), quota laws and other corrective measures are temporary and will be discontinued when equal participation of women and men is achieved and maintained.

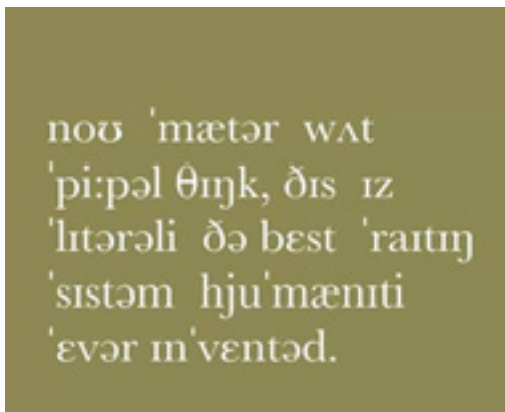


Teacher development sessions

These are sessions that involve training on a specific topic and these can be very varied. Many purely online teacher development groups have a fixed slot for such events and topics are chosen by the community and offered by different people. They may also involve outside speakers. What you can do is limited by the tools. These sessions are more easily run in video conferencing tools like Zoom, but can also be run making use of communication tools like WhatsApp or Telegram. A session could be an input on a topic of current concern to the teachers, e.g., the introduction of a new syllabus, or coursebook, or a new methodological focus. The British Council's Teaching for Success: self-study booklets, based on the Continuing Professional Development Framework for teachers, can be used with groups to explore twelve different areas of practice. The complete set of guides can be found here: [Teaching for success self-study guides](#)

Debates/Discussions

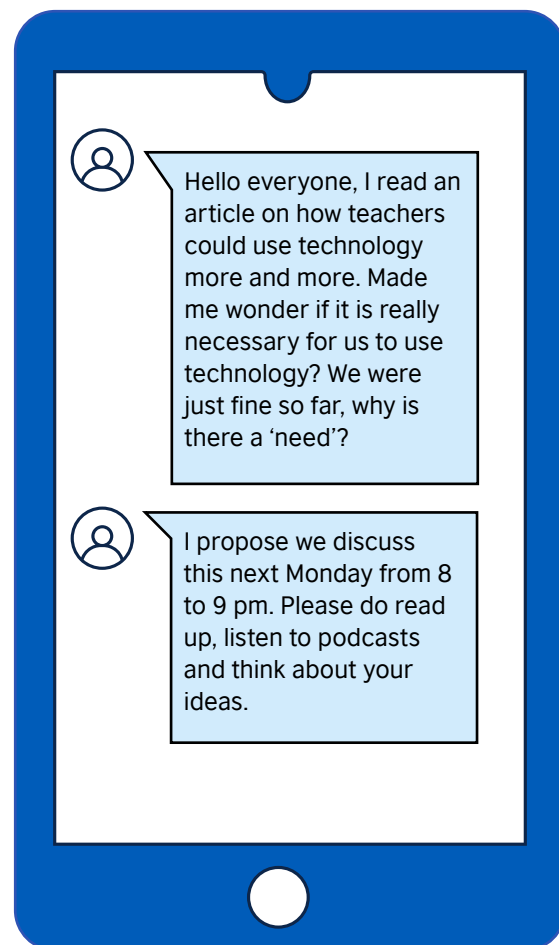
The group based in Guinea Bissau do a lot of short debates. One recent interesting example is based around the phonemic alphabet. Linda Ruas, one of the initiating members of the group, posted this message in phonemic script.

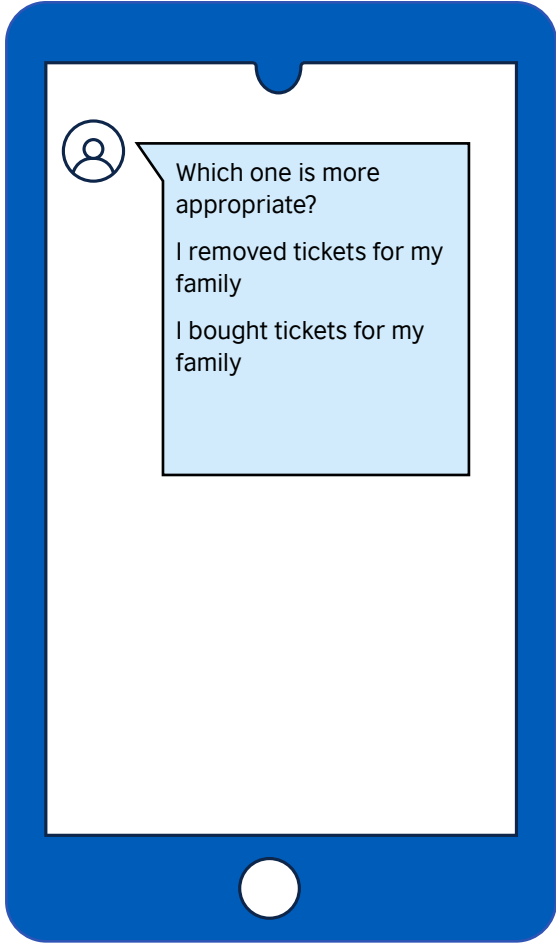


This stimulated some initial discussion about phonemic script and its value. They were also offered an article on the topic. One of the group members volunteered to post other examples to give the teachers practice in reading phonemic script. These became small quotations from famous people. People then started talking about the meaning of the quotations and how they felt about the sentiments expressed.

Here is a more general topic that encourages the teachers to prepare in advance for the debate.

There could also be discussion around specific language examples.





Word/Song/Picture of the day (week)

This is a post that needs little preparation and is a way of stimulating contributions by getting people to comment on the posting. It can be a way of introducing teachers to new vocabulary, but also encourage them to discuss the meanings of words and how they are used. Songs can be from a variety of artists, which can be linked to specific language for teaching purposes, or used as a lead-in to discussing the focus of the song.

Pictures can serve various functions, but can encourage discussions about a variety of topics. Pictures can also be used to provide information about language, for example. You can find lots of pictures on the internet, but should acknowledge where you have got the pictures from. The two pictures here come from Getty images and are royalty free with no release required, so we can make use of them in our group.

Discussion!!!

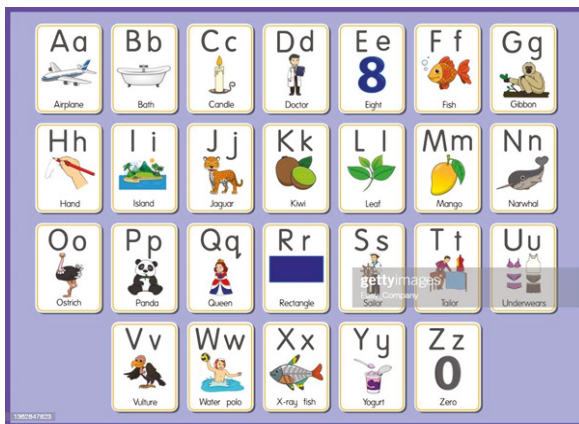
Date: From May 28 - 31, 2021
Time: From 9.00 AM GMT

Topic: Exam Malpractices

1. Define exam malpractice
2. Advantage/disadvantaha of exam malpractice
3. List any technic or strategy students use to cheat in exams
4. What may be the punishments/reqard of exam malpractice?

Share any experience! 20:09





Quizzes

Quizzes can be of various types and, like debates, can be on a variety of topics. These might be about language, or about general topics of interest. It is not difficult to find quizzes online on a whole variety of topics that you can adapt to your needs. If you simply search for quizzes, then you tend to get questions that are very western oriented, but if you search for particular regions of the world, you can also find lots of regional questions.

Below is an advert for a quiz that focuses on Mother's Day.

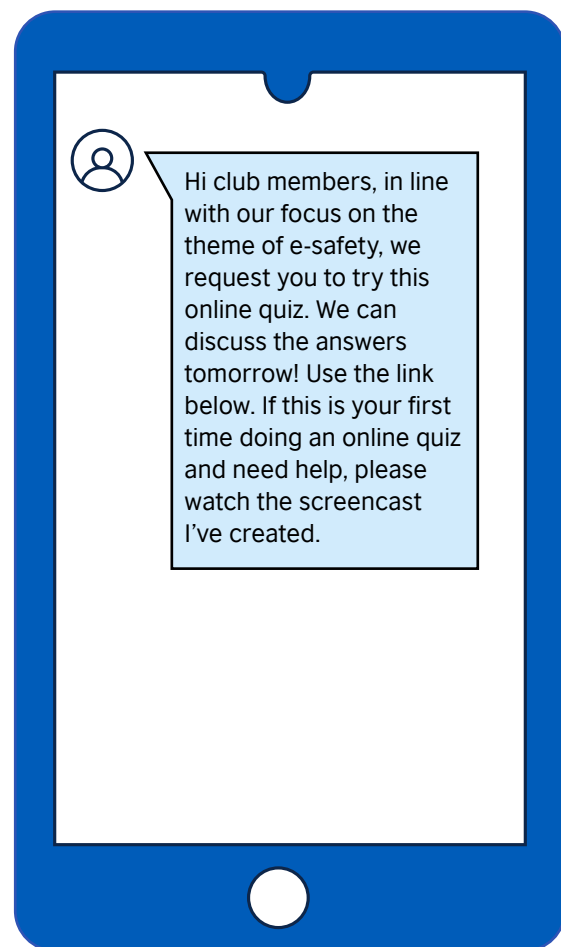
You can, of course, create your own quiz about a topic that is relevant to your group and then use this as the basis of a discussion as well.



The weekend quiz to enjoy Mother's Day evening 🕒👉
bit.ly/ACY_QuizScience-Techno

Social events

Teachers' groups play a significant role in developing teachers' resilience and as well as being about becoming better teachers, they are an opportunity to be social as well. Groups that last tend to be ones where there is an investment by the community, and this includes either online or face-to-face meetings (or both) that are more social in nature. Allowing the teachers to post messages that are not about teaching, but that are about members of the community and their lives, keeps the group together. If it is then possible for the groups to meet up on occasion, even if only on a very local basis, this can be very beneficial.



Archiving materials

Resources created by the group can be archived for everyone's use, provided the creators of the materials give their permission and there are no copyright issues. There are a number of 'free' tools like Google Drive, OneDrive (Microsoft), DropBox, Baidu (based in China) which provide online storage. These also provide additional functionality with documents that can be shared amongst a community, or forms for conducting surveys. Google also runs Google Classroom where it brings a number of tools together for the purpose of education,

You can also set up free websites that offer some free storage: weebly.com, or wix.com are possible options, or you could look at blogs (WordPress, Blogger, Medium, or Tumblr, for example). You might want to consider a tool like a wiki, as well (pbworks, for example <https://www.pbworks.com/wikis.html>).

Evaluating your group

You may want to monitor the 'health' of your group, and this can be carried out in various ways. A lot of this has to do with counting, so initial numbers of members, the growth of the group, the frequency of activities. You may want to look at who posts and how often. Having campaigns to encourage posting and activity will help to boost the contributions, but there will inevitably be significant numbers who will monitor the activity and perhaps never contribute. However, as can be seen above in the discussion of 'lurkers', this is not necessarily an issue to be concerned about.

With some communication tools it is possible to easily export the ongoing conversation and look in detail at the interactions. You can make use of thematic analysis to explore what topics people are talking about and what is popular (see discussion of thematic analysis in part 2).



You can also explore who is contributing, seeing whether both female and male teachers are taking a part in the activity, for example.

Another way of finding out how the group feels about what is happening is to make use of what are termed 'pulse' questionnaires. These are regular, but very short surveys, that are designed to get regular feedback on the health of an organisation ([Everything You Need to Know About Employee Pulse Surveys](#)), or, in this case, of the group. These can consist of one or two open ended questions to get suggestions, or can be questionnaires of five to ten questions. You can make use of the same tools recommended above to conduct the surveys.

Where to go from here

Running a teacher's group can take up a lot of time, but can also be very rewarding. Most people do it, because they want to contribute back to their community, or because they are looking for ways to provide effective teacher development where there are limited opportunities. Practice continues to evolve and the technologies we make use of become more capable of doing what is needed. However, the starting point should always be what is needed in a community in a particular place and at a particular time. We hope you find these materials useful.



What do you think?

What are you going to do next? What is your action plan?

Part 6

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