

CASE STUDIES ON NEW LEARNING COMMUNITIES: EMERGING RESULTS FROM FIELD ANALYSIS

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The main interest of the study

To investigate the innovation
emerging in
12 on-line communities in
pedagogical and
organisational terms



Desk research

- Identification and selection of communities
- Content analysis
- Interaction analysis



Field research

- Interviews
- Surveys



The Data Collection Toolkit

- ▶ *Case Study Procedures*
- ▶ *Case Study Work Sheet*
- ▶ *Case Study Observation Sheet*
- ▶ *Output Notes*
- ▶ *Case Study Interview Schedule*
- ▶ *Survey schedule*
- ▶ *Observation of the interactions*
- ▶ *Content analysis*
- ▶ *Outcomes*



Data capturing

Collaboration of the involved communities					
Community Name	Interview Community Manager / Staff	Interview Members	Survey	Observation	Supporting material
<u>TappedIn</u>	2	3	//	x	x
<u>RezEd</u>	1	4	11	x	
<u>eTwinning – Time after Time</u>	3	2	5	//	x
<u>CEDET</u>	2	3	101	x	
<u>Il Cantiere</u>	1	5	16	x	
<u>Microbiological Forum</u>	1	4	51	x	
<u>Englishforums</u>	1	4	9	x	
<u>Tudiabetes</u>	1	4	105	x	
<u>Bookcrossing</u>	2	3	216	x	
<u>Experience Project</u>	1	2	38	x	
<u>GAY.tv</u>	2	3	488	x	
<u>Muxlim</u>	1	2	//	x	



The Communities

- [eTwinning -Time after Time](#)
- [CEDDET](#)
- [TappedIn](#)
- [RezEd](#)
- [Microbiology Forum](#)
- [Englishforums](#)
- [TuDiabetes](#)
- [Bookcrossing](#)
- [GAY.tv](#)
- [Muxlim](#)
- [Experience Project](#)
- [Il Cantiere](#)



Microbiology Forum

The Microbiology Forum allows microbiologists to primarily keep up to date with current requirements and trends, discuss with peers and gain support for new ideas or advice when in need of practical know-how.

- The main aims and objectives are:
- To create an area where practitioners can “benchmark their practices”, share notes, debate and get advice on matters related to their field.
- To help practitioners keep up-to-date with new initiatives and thus keep an open mind and facilitate continuous improvement and greater uniformity amongst practices.

Members: 8,372



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Pharmaceutical Microbiology Forum (PMF). The header includes the PMF logo and navigation links: Home, PMF Newsletters, Upcoming Events, PMF Registration, PMF History, and Contact Us. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains a welcome message, a description of the forum's purpose (founded in 1992), and information about the newsletter and mail list. The right column lists upcoming events, including Environmental Monitoring, PMF Puerto Rico Microbiology Sessions, PMF Conference on Microbial Investigations, Management of the Microbiology Function in a Regulated Industry, Cosmetic Microbiology, 2009 PMF Fall Forum, and Bacterial Endotoxin Summit (BES). The footer includes a copyright notice for 2007 and a note that the forum is moderated by Scott Sutton, Ph.D.



Microbiology Forum

Main learning features	Main points of interest
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Access to debate and content that members (microbiologists) could not access elsewhere➤ Learning happens by “peer exchange, evaluating discussions, trying to be innovative and being part of an active community” (manager Interview)➤ Benchmarking of ideas and practices (support to theoretican and laboratory professional development)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Professional community funded by corporate sponsors but independent➤ Highly acknowledged in the field, with the negative effect that some companies are reducing their training budget and encouraging their employees to participate in the community instead.➤ 15 years history, members from 88 countries➤ Professional development is coupled with increased self esteem as main outcomes of community participation



Quotes

“Similar information transfer happens at industry seminars, however topics are limited and attendees are sometimes coy about asking questions (they do not want to appear stupid!). Here the topics are not limited and you can ask anything at all and someone usually points at the right direction without prejudice”. (Member interview)

“[...] the community has also given me the opportunity to demonstrate my own capabilities to my colleagues” (Member interview)

“In the professional arena microbiologists are generally low within hierarchy. The fact that through the community they are allowed to grow in stature [...] allows them to become, and be viewed, as experts in the subject matter at hand”.

(Manager interview)

[Being a member of the community] improve my credibility as a researcher internationally and improve my general personality to be an open-minded person. (Survey reply)

[Being a member of the community] reinforce my technical decisions, get a handle on common or best practices. (Survey reply)



Considerations

- ▶ Members join to upgrade professionally and take advantage of a very active community where peer support is the key for success.
- ▶ Beside improving their work performance, they claim significant side effects in terms of increased self confidence and self esteem.
- ▶ Though there is a precise choice not to have a formal role in training, the value of the debates and contents have made the community highly acknowledged, with positive and negative side effects.
- ▶ The community has been alive for 15 years and it is still very active and successful despite the low technological endowment and the inconvenient economic model chosen.



CEDDET offers online courses to LA institutions with the objective to improve their management procedures. Within CEDDET, the Latin American Experts Network on Public Management aims to:

- promote the collaboration between public organizations and the development of common activities in a Latin American context.
- create a permanent forum to share knowledge, and exchange experiences and good practice.
- improve lifelong learning programs
- give the opportunity to CEDDET training courses participants to keep in touch.

Members: 770



FUNDACIÓN CEDDET

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REDES DE EXPERTOS

- Programa Redes
 - Redes en funcionamiento

El Programa Redes de Expertos Iberoamericanos (REI) es un proyecto que nació a finales de 2004 con el objetivo de que profesionales iberoamericanos de distintas áreas temáticas, que previamente hubieran participado en los cursos online coorganizados por la Fundación CEDDET, se mantuvieran en contacto y continuaran intercambiando experiencias y conocimientos, con el fin último de contribuir al fortalecimiento institucional de sus países.

Las Redes de Expertos Iberoamericanos, auspiciadas por instituciones españolas e internacionales, son comunidades virtuales en las que se promueve el intercambio de conocimientos y mejores prácticas, así como la colaboración entre organizaciones públicas en el espacio iberoamericano para el desarrollo de actividades de gestión del conocimiento, esencialmente mediante la formación continua (cursos cortos de Actualización online), celebración de Foros de Expertos, elaboración de Revistas digitales, o generación de bibliotecas temáticas, entre otras.

Actualmente el Programa cuenta con 15 redes en funcionamiento en las siguientes áreas temáticas:

RED DE ANTIGUOS ALUMNOS DE LA MAESTRÍA RAAM	REI en GESTIÓN DE RESIDUOS
REI en CALIDAD	REI en CATASTRO
REI en ENERGÍA	REI en GESTIÓN PÚBLICA
REI en COMERCIO EXTERIOR	REI en TURISMO
REI en PARLAMENTOS	REI en INFRAESTRUCTURAS Y TRANSPORTE
REI en PROPIEDAD INDUSTRIAL	REI en GESTIÓN PORTUARIA
REI en SEGURIDAD SOCIAL	REI en FISCALIZACIÓN
REI en GESTIÓN DEL CONOCIMIENTO	

Más información sobre el funcionamiento del Programa Redes de Expertos: [descargar aquí](#) (PDF, 750 Kb)

 Acceso a la REI

Main learning features	Main points of interest
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Formal and informal Learning happening (refresher courses vs Forums).➤ The community addresses the professional upgrade needs of a closed group of PA experts and practitioners in a defined and vast area (LA, Spain)➤ Learning happens through the sharing of theoretical knowledge and through practice exchange among participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Quite “structured” community➤ Closed experts network➤ Cross-cultural collaborative exchange among professionals (Latin America and Spain)➤ Community started from the suggestion of participants to on-line courses who wanted to keep in touch and keep on discussing on relevant topics➤ The community fosters cultural awareness and expression



Quotes

"I think the most positive aspect of being involved in this community is that I have developed myself professionally. [...] and obviously to learn from all the Latin American experience"

(Member interview)

"The community with the exchange that takes place is unique because this could not be done in a full time classroom course. For this reason the community is just fantastic".

(Member interview)

"We have never considered ourselves as a social network. Suddenly I believe we have become a social network"

(Manager interview)

"[Being a member of the community] helped me to improve my ability to work in team".

(Survey reply)



Considerations

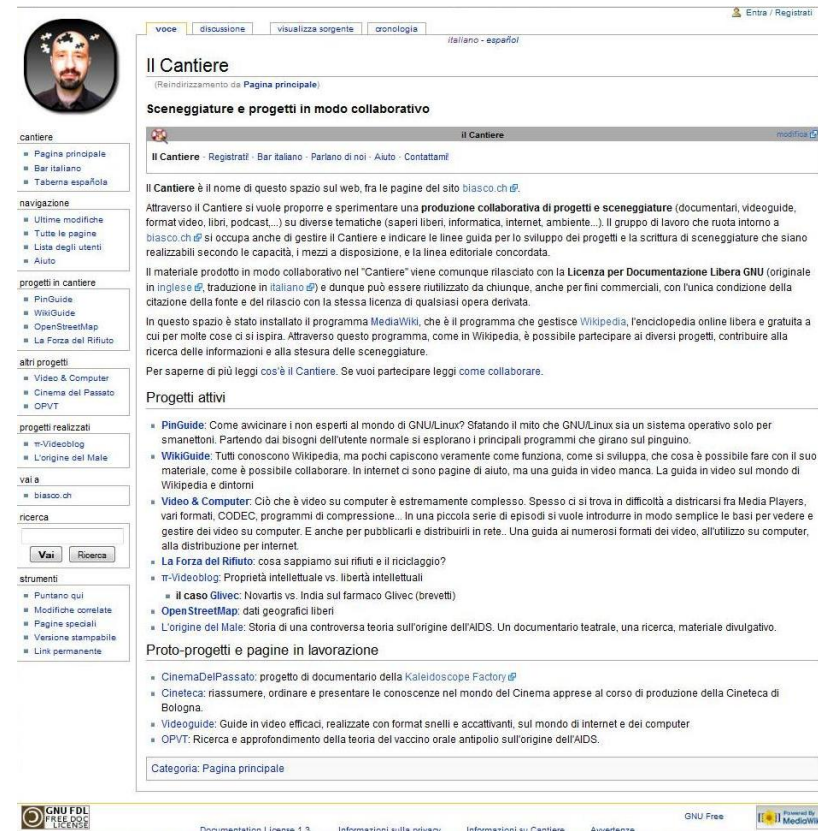
- ▶ This is a good example of a community where learning is an explicit aim (with refresher courses), but informal learning also emerges through interaction of participants (Forums) leading to practice exchange among LA countries and Spain in the field of Public Administration
- ▶ Contrarily to all other communities, this one has restricted access. Only people who have attended and passed at least one course are invited. Their motivation to join is to keep in touch, share experiences and documents which are relevant to their profession.
- ▶ The community was born with socializing aims (keeping in touch after courses) but it then evolved into a learning community.
- ▶ Learning outcomes are tracked (refresher courses, Forums, Electronic Journal).



Il Cantiere

The main aim of the “Il Cantiere” community is “to propose and experiment” a collaborative approach which finds a concrete output in the development and production of videos on free software use. This is a production oriented community, born to experiment with a collaborative approach to production.

Members: 50



The screenshot shows the MediaWiki page for "Il Cantiere". The page title is "Il Cantiere" with a subtitle "(Reindirizzamento da Pagina principale)". The main heading is "Sceneggiature e progetti in modo collaborativo". The page content includes a description of the community's goals, a list of active projects, and navigation links. The active projects listed are:

- PinGuide:** Come avvicinare i non esperti al mondo di GNU/Linux? Sfatando il mito che GNU/Linux sia un sistema operativo solo per smanettoni. Partendo dai bisogni dell'utente normale si esplorano i principali programmi che girano sul pinguino.
- WikiGuide:** Tutti conoscono Wikipedia, ma pochi capiscono veramente come funziona, come si sviluppa, che cosa è possibile fare con il suo materiale, come è possibile collaborare. In internet ci sono pagine di aiuto, ma una guida in video manca. La guida in video sul mondo di Wikipedia e dintorni
- Video & Computer:** Ciò che è video su computer è estremamente complesso. Spesso ci si trova in difficoltà a districarsi fra Media Players, vari formati, CODEC, programmi di compressione... in una piccola serie di episodi si vuole introdurre in modo semplice le basi per vedere e gestire dei video su computer. E anche per pubblicarli e distribuirli in rete. Una guida ai numerosi formati del video, all'utilizzo su computer, alla distribuzione per internet.
- La Forza del Rifiuto:** cosa sappiamo sui rifiuti e il riciclaggio?
- π-Videoblog:** Proprietà intellettuale vs. libertà intellettuali
 - Il caso Glivec:** Novartis vs. India sul farmaco Glivec (brevetti)
- OpenStreetMap:** dati geografici liberi
- L'origine del Male:** Storia di una controversa teoria sull'origine dell'AIDS. Un documentario teatrale, una ricerca, materiale divulgativo.

The page also includes a search bar, a list of navigation links, and a footer with GNU FDL and MediaWiki logos.



Il Cantiere

Main learning features	Main points of interest
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The learning happens in the very process of sharing and confronting➤ Practical knowledge➤ Practical application of innovative theories➤ Creativity➤ Digital skills improvement➤ Knowledge Co-costruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Spontaneous self-regulation➤ Potentiality of the collaborative approach➤ Constructive, positive, fruitful atmosphere➤ General satisfaction of all participants.➤ Strong cooperative spirit➤ Flexibility and openness to different viewpoints, approaches, ideas.➤ Reciprocal respect among participants



Quotes

“Individuals feel free to express themselves, their opinions and ideas and become more creative and self-confident when they realize their contribution is actually helpful and appreciated by others” (Manager Interview)

“I joined because I thought that together we could learn from each other and have fun. Later I realized it could also be useful for me to develop new skills and become more creative”(Member Interview)

“[thanks to the involvement] I became more creative, more critical and more digitally skilled (..), I also became aware of the importance of being as clear, correct and neutral as possible” (Member Interview)

“[Being a member of the community] helped me to understand how to generate and develop a creative project” (Survey reply)



Considerations

- ▶ This is a production-driven and self-organised community with no explicit learning aims.
- ▶ Learning is the result of collaborative production and of the discussion, knowledge and experience sharing involved in this process.
- ▶ Despite the community does not have an explicit educational aim, its outputs (videos) are educational
- ▶ Members join to produce collaboratively in the field of free software. Interviews suggest that their personal esteem of the founder had a role in choosing to join.
- ▶ According to interview results, collaborative production has supported the development of organisational, technological, communication and social skills.



The main aims and objectives of the GAY.tv community are to:
 Share experiences and information
 Meet people
 Socialize and support each other
 The main feature of the community is the gay target audience. The difference between the GAY.tv website community and other gay communities is that it is more like a social network than a dating community.

Members: 131.932



The screenshot shows the GAY.tv website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with fields for 'nickname' and 'password', and buttons for 'LOGIN' and 'iscriviti'. Below this is a banner for 'Nokia 5800 XpressMusic' with a 'Scopri di più' button. The main navigation menu includes 'MAGAZINE', 'COMMUNITY', 'VIDEOCHAT', 'GAY.fm', and 'SHOPPING'. A secondary menu lists 'GALLERY', 'CANALI', 'FASHION', 'THE BOY/GIRL', 'FORUM', 'TEST', 'SONDAGGI', 'ASTE ONLINE', and 'YOOX'. The main content area features a large article titled 'Ed Westwick di 'Gossip Girl' placca un amico allo stadio. Le foto >' with a photo of Ed Westwick. To the right is a 'VOTA!' widget for 'G-FACTOR, ULTIMA SFIDA: VOTA IL VINCITORE'. Below the main article are several smaller widgets: 'OBAMA LIBERA I FINANZIAMENTI ALLA RICERCA PER LE STABILITÀ CATTOLICI ALL'ATTACCO', 'CLAUDIO SANTAMARIA INTERPRETA UN OMOSESSUALE NELLA SERIE TV 'LE COSE CHE RESTANO'. GALLERY>', 'DAREH KAGA SOFF, LA VITA SEGRETA DI UN TEENAGER AMERICANO. GALLERY>', 'LA FOTO DEL GIORNO', 'TUTTE LE GALLERY', 'SONDAGGIO SANREMO 2009: CHI È IL VERO VINCITORE?', and 'TEST SAI RISPETTARE I BUONI PROPOSITI?'. At the bottom left, there is a 'genova pride' logo.



Main learning features	Main points of interest
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Informal, incidental learning➤ Knowledge and experiences sharing➤ Practical Knowledge (learning to live homosexuality in a positive way)➤ Centralized discussion spurs on gay life topics to raise awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Community with social network features➤ Strong awareness raising role➤ Members' sense of belonging➤ Active, positive model for LGBT people➤ Majority of lurkers



Quotes

"The main type of benefit is the opportunity to avoid isolation and participate in an environment where the gay lifestyle is presented in the most positive way possible"
(Manager Interview)

"I don't think we can say we have explicit learning activities in the community ...but it may be true that – through our trivia [game] we involve people on important issues through which – maybe- they can learn something"
(Staff member interview)

"I realize I am learning now that you are making me think about it"
(Member interview)

"ICT allows people to "hide behind the screen"
(Survey reply)

"[Being a member of the community] reassures me: I've realized that I'm not alone and that, as many other people, I can live my life normally 😊"
(Survey reply)



Considerations

- ▶ Learning is not an explicit aim of this community, it happens unintentionally.
- ▶ Learning happens through interaction. Members learn to express themselves, to respect other people's opinions, to help others, to ask for help, to share what they know.
- ▶ Members join to avoid isolation and to be free to express their identity in a safe space.
- ▶ Members can discuss on general topics feeling free to express their opinions from a gay perspective
- ▶ Survey showed that a relevant number of members, helped by anonymity, have made the first step towards acceptance inside the community



RezEd can be described as an “expert community” whose participants are committed to explore further the features and potential of virtual worlds for learning. In particular, they pursue the following objectives:

- To share information on state-of-the-art technologies and practices, and related events and conventions (traditional and online)
- To share good practices in the use of virtual worlds for learning purposes
- To refine both conceptual and pedagogical models and practices
- To explore emerging features brought about by the use of virtual worlds for learning, such as ethics and ethical behaviour.

Members: 1447

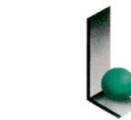


The screenshot shows the RezEd website homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, My Page, Podcasts, Blogs, Forum, Events, Groups, Aha Moments, and RezEd Report. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Welcome to RezEd (BETA):** An online hub providing practitioners using virtual worlds with access to the highest quality resources and research in the field to establish a strong network of those using virtual worlds for learning.
- Members:** A grid of small profile pictures of community members.
- Events:** A calendar for March 2009 showing dates from 1 to 31.
- Engage! Expo:** Information about an event on March 10, 2009 at 6pm at the Jacob Javitz Center.
- Margaret Corbit:** Information about an event on March 12, 2009 at 8am at the University of...
- New on RezEd...:** A section highlighting recent content, including a podcast episode featuring Jim Bower and a featured discussion by Laura Jacob of McGuffey High School.
- LEARNCOM wants to hear from YOU:** A call to action for the community.
- RezEd Report Available Online!** A section about the seasonal report summarizing activities and discussions.
- Special Podcast:** Information about a podcast exploring the issue of Ethics and Virtual Worlds.

On the right side of the page, there are several utility boxes:

- Welcome to RezEd:** A sign-up or sign-in button.
- How To Use RezEd:** A section explaining that RezEd is a community for learning and virtual worlds.
- Share your voice:** A section encouraging users to contribute to discussions.
- Listen to the twice-a-month podcast:** A section with a podcast icon.
- Read or contribute to RezEd Community Aha Moments:** A section with a lightbulb icon.
- Browse or contribute to the library:** A section with a book icon.
- Join a special interest group, or create your own:** A section with a group of people icon.
- List an event:** A section with a calendar icon.



Main learning features	Main points of interest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>“RezEd explicitly pursues the goal of stimulating learning among its members, making the best out of diversity (position, experience, professional background” (manager interview)</i> ➤ Newcomers are guided to get to know the community ➤ Learning happens by knowledge and practice sharing and by interaction. ➤ Lurking (if temporary) is not considered negatively, rather as a way of learning how the community works. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Expert community exploring the potential of virtual worlds for learning. Focus on theory and practice related to virtual worlds ➤ Discussions launched by community animators are tracked, those launched by members are not. ➤ Open community (“to real people and avatars”) ➤ Marketing strategy, but word of mouth is important ➤ Community used as a platform to start new partnerships and develop one’s network



Quotes

"The issue of measuring learning outcomes has not been addressed. The community is an informal learning setting where members are engaged in learning activities out of their willingness and interest. The only possible measure might be their feedback/level of satisfaction once they have applied in their daily activity what they have learnt in the community" (Manager interview)

"it is not a matter of teaching and learning [in the community] but to share knowledge and elaborate together on a stream of thoughts. This is what collaborative learning is about" (Member interview)

"I could not connect with most of these people without distance technologies. I live in an isolated part of the US and am at an institution where the chancellor is actively working to eliminate videogames from campus because of their supposed addictive effect. I need this group just to keep me sane" (Survey reply)

"It is very important that communities are active in the ICT 'world'. This is because they can feed information about themselves and for themselves to develop further. Access information that can be useful to them is another aspect. Another point is that through interacting with ICTs, communities bridges the digital divide. These points are governed by the notion that ICTs are a human rights issue"

(Survey reply)



Considerations

- ▶ According to the words of the manager *Learning is an explicit goal but happens informally and unintentionally.*
- ▶ The hierarchical model adopted supports the well functioning of the community but prevents in some cases active participation
- ▶ Learning happens mainly through discussions, these can be started with a paper, a podcast, a video.
- ▶ Members join because they want to be part of a community that does something important and want to learn through participation and for networking and partnership search.



EnglishForums

The main goal of the Englishforums is to help people learn English. It is based on the principle of questions and answers, where members of the community both ask the questions and answer each other. This way they try to gather as much information on different aspects of the English language as possible. It is dedicated to learning a language by involving people from all over the world in a community with a shared goal.

Members: 78000



The screenshot shows the homepage of EnglishForums.com. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, Forums, Tests, Friends, ESL Chat, Pics, and Videos. A search bar is located on the right side of the navigation bar. Below the navigation bar, there is a 'Most Active Users' section featuring a grid of user avatars and names. To the right of this section, there is a 'Welcome to the world's largest EFL / TEFL social network' message with a 'new post' button. Below the welcome message, there are several advertisements for language learning services, including 'Glo School' and 'English Conversation'. On the far right, there is a 'Shortcuts' section with links to 'Who's online now?', 'Translate tool', 'Guidelines and conditions', and 'Other great places'. Below the shortcuts, there is a 'Live chat' section with a 'Fullscreen' button and a list of active users. At the bottom of the page, there is a 'What's hot' section with a list of popular topics and a 'Latest videos and images' section.



EnglishForums

Main learning features	Main points of interest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Learning (English) is an explicit aim of the community. ➤ The spill overs from the main activity – learning the language – are: learn how to teach the language: learn how to find information; learn how to use ICT; develop social skills, develop critical thinking. ➤ These learning outcomes are mainly developed passively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Culture of the community: policy on loose roles: policy on good manner of discussion; trust the people you trust ➤ “Military organisation with a hippie attitude” (administrators, moderators, trusted users) ➤ Most members are lurkers ➤ Plan to award qualifications for the different levels of language proficiency



Quotes

"Because this is a virtual environment it has some positive elements which do not exist in real life. For example one can't see the person he/she is talking to and draw any conclusion about their age or social status. This makes it much easier on moderators and even other users to halt people who are too extreme in their discussions. In a real life a young moderator might have quite a problem gaining authority over an older person in the community"

(Manager interview)

"The main internal problem is misbehaviour of the users. The procedure is that first, the problematic post is discussed among the moderators, and then the person is warned, watched and in worst case scenario banned from the community"

(Member interview)

"It is the ease that allows one to ask questions in an appropriate forum. It is there to access at any time, night or day. I google lot of things I want to know about, which led me to English Forums, and I found lots of posts I could help with answers.

Glad to be able to"

(Survey reply)



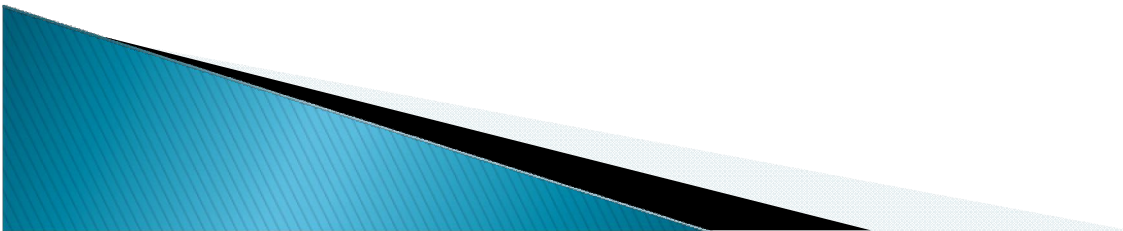
Considerations

- ▶ Learning happens mainly by making questions and receiving answers on various issues (grammar, expression, pronunciation) concerning the English language
- ▶ Interviewed members state this community differs from the other similar ones as all questions are answered in a short time and answers stay there forever.
- ▶ The community plans to provide formal learning certificates.
- ▶ Born as a community to support students, it now helps also teachers in better teaching the language and updating/solving doubts.
- ▶ There is significant unintentional learning in terms of social and critical skills.
- ▶ Members join to learn English and benefit from total flexibility coupled with the development of the culture of discussion and making new friends.



Conclusions

... more questions than answers



Thank you

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