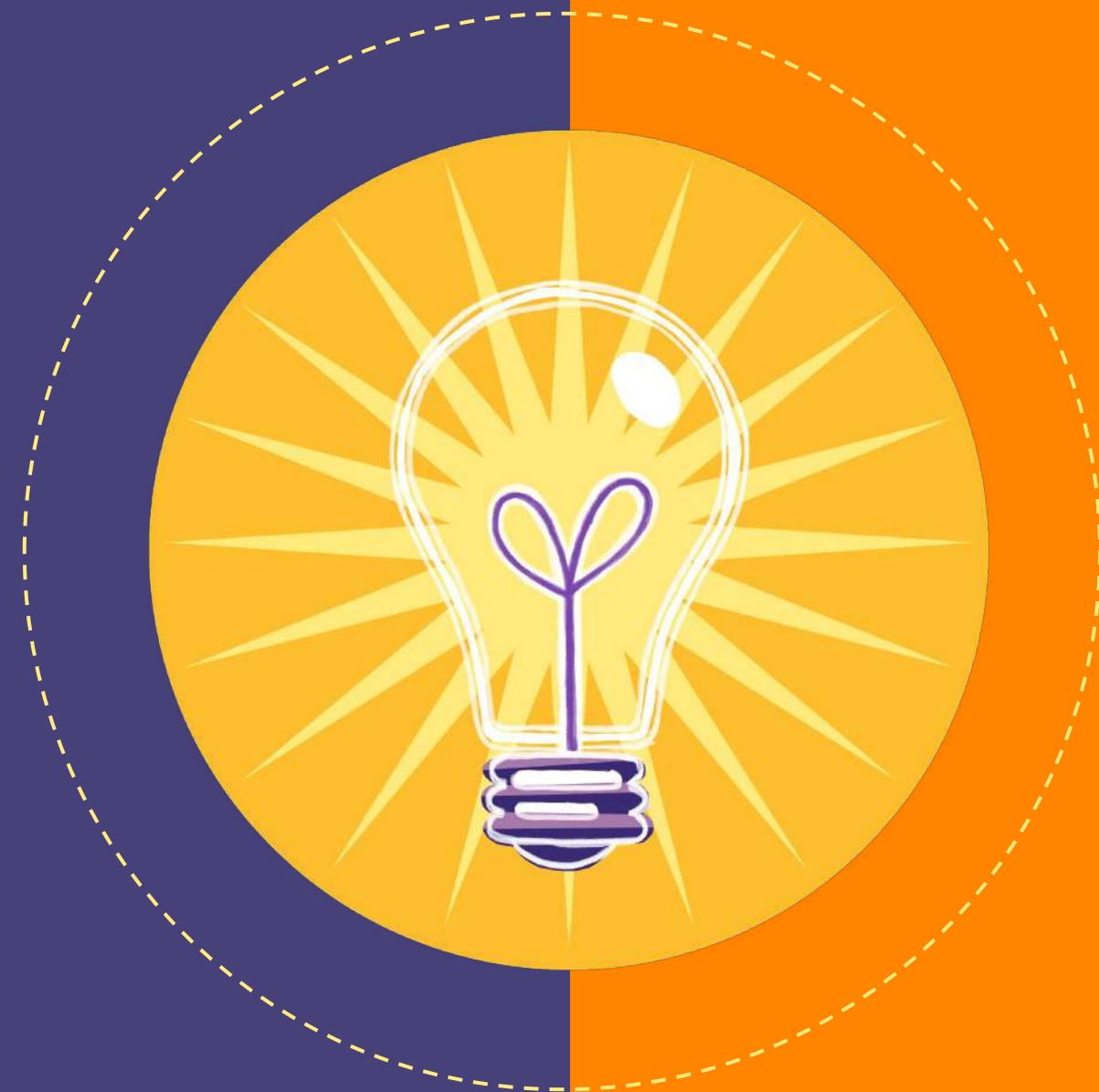




**8 good reasons why setting up a learning
community is a great idea**

#1

Learning communities extend learning using familiar platforms.



Phil says, "We recently spoke with Jordan Buckner, a film-maker, artist and lecturer in animation. Jordan moved his teaching into online spaces his students were already using - particularly Twitch and Discord. In doing so, Jordan was able to minimise disruption to his students' learning experience."



In our podcast with Jordan, he discusses the benefits and challenges of moving his teaching into his students' online world, and explains how less formal online activities can help to build meaningful learning relationships between tutors and students."

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Discord

What Is It?

DISCORD is an instant messaging platform designed for creating and supporting communities. These communities are called 'servers', so you might hear people talking about 'joining a Discord server'.

Discord users mainly communicate by sending and receiving text-based messages, images and links. However, it is also possible to interact with other people using voice and video calls.

What's the learning value?



Dr. Tony says "while teaching in real time on Zoom is great, the learning stops when the session ends. But by using a tool such as Discord, you can extend your classroom into the gaps between taught sessions."

"This enables you to lay the foundations of an online learning community. Discord provides a robust, configurable platform that enables learners to talk with each other at all hours of the day and night. Conversations are organised around 'channels', which makes it easy to support multiple conversations. It's also easy to invite people and moderate discussions."

Can I have an example?

Listen to [Jordan Buckner](#), lecturer in Art Direction at the University of Portsmouth, talk about using Discord to support his students and extend learning opportunities.

Also, this article by [Dr. Mark Bissman](#) from Colorado State University provides a case study of using Discord in Higher Education.

How do I get started?



The introductory video from Discord provides a good starting point, and gives a clear summary of what it can be used for.

The [Beginner's Guide to Discord](#) also provides clear guidance on how to set up and manage a Discord server.

And if you'd like some hands-on support, why not book a tutorial with the Ding team?

Still hungry? Fancy something more substantial? Check out our [Ding O-Meter](#) podcast where we talk to people about awesome online learning.

Ding Bites

Bite-sized technology guides

Twitch

What Is it?

TWITCH is a live-streaming platform that enables you to build communities around live events.

'Live-streaming' is really another way of saying 'watching something online as it happens'. The practice of live-streaming originated in eSports, where audiences watch players playing online games. But educators are increasingly exploring the potential of Twitch to teach online.

What's the learning value?



Dr. Tony says "In an educational context, live-streaming can be used to help learners develop their sense of community. It's a bit like putting on an event in a public space or a gallery - the value comes from the fact that teachers and students are having a shared experience in a neutral space."

"As teaching moves increasingly online, live-streaming enables us to harness the power of the public space to create live events. This develops students' shared emotional connectors, which can lead to an increase in engagement."

Can I have an example?

Listen to [Jordan Buckner](#), lecturer in Art Direction at the University of Portsmouth, talk about using Twitch to livestream his painting classes.

Also, pages 30-32 of the Open University's [Innovating Pedagogy 2020](#) report contain helpful examples and case studies of Twitch being used for teaching and learning.

How do I get started?



The [ultimate guide to Twitch](#) from ReStream is a great place to start, and explains everything you need to know.

The guide covers everything from creating a Twitch account to thinking about the quality of camera and microphone you'll need.

And if you'd like some hands-on support, why not book a tutorial with the Ding team?

Still hungry? Fancy something more substantial? Check out our [Ding O-Meter](#) podcast where we talk to people about awesome online learning.

Download our bite-sized guide to Twitch or guide to Discord

#2

Learning communities extend learning beyond the 'taught' sessions and enable students to learn flexibly.



Tony says, "For many people, teaching online just involves putting documents and videos online and arranging some taught sessions. But a learning community can provide an ecosystem of learning activities, and enable students and tutors to interact in between these sessions."

'By enabling students and tutors to continue the conversation from the taught sessions, a learning community significantly extends opportunities for students to learn. It also drives engagement, retention and satisfaction as students are interacting regularly, at times that are convenient for them.'



#3

Learning communities can bring students into positions of responsibility.



Phil says, *"One of the things I found was, by giving students roles within the community, I noticed how it would affect their confidences in everything else they were doing on the course. I had a system where I would invite students to become 'guest bloggers' on the course's shared blog. They'd be asked to publish content on their own interests."*



Tony says, *"Good point Phil - devolving power from the tutor to the students enables students to take more ownership of their learning. In doing so, they learn how to think and act responsibly, manage conflict, and develop their professional voice."*

"If we want to produce graduates who are able to take responsibility, we have to create opportunities for them to learn how to do this while they are at university. Inviting students to have specific roles in a learning community is an effective way to achieve this."

#4

Learning communities can develop students' professionalism, take more ownership of their online identity and create a positive digital footprint.



Phil says, *"Whenever we invited in guest lecturers from industry, I noticed my students would modify their behaviour. Students were more alert, more punctual, more likely to want to show, share and discuss their work constructively, and were even more conscious of their appearance."*

"I realised there was real power in bringing the outside in. By opening up my community of learners to the outside world, I was able to consistently produce these more professionalised behaviours."

The enhancements in the ways in which students presented themselves and their work on line were rapid and dramatic."

Tony says, *"Aligning a learning community with a learning outcome of professionalism can benefit students' employability. It also supports the aim of universities to produce graduates who are able to use their initiative."*



#5

Learning communities can help students develop their confidence at interacting with others.



Tony says, “When we join a community, we often ‘lurk’ on the fringes until we feel confident enough to become more visible. As we gradually become more confident, we engage in more discussion and move closer to the centre of the community.”

As this happens, the community shapes our sense of identity and belonging, and this in turn further develops our confidence.”

Phil says, “Every year I would welcome a new cohort of 1st year students, many of whom had little or no self-confidence. Some would have specific learning needs, and others would just be incredibly socially awkward.”

‘But time and again, the existence of the learning community provided a way for them to gradually develop their confidence at talking with others using their coursework as a topic of conversation.’



#6

Learning communities provide opportunities for peer learning and feedback.



Tony says, "A learning community can save you time in practical ways. One key way is by making it part of your assessment toolkit. Getting your students to peer assess each other's work can transform their ability to think critically about their own work."

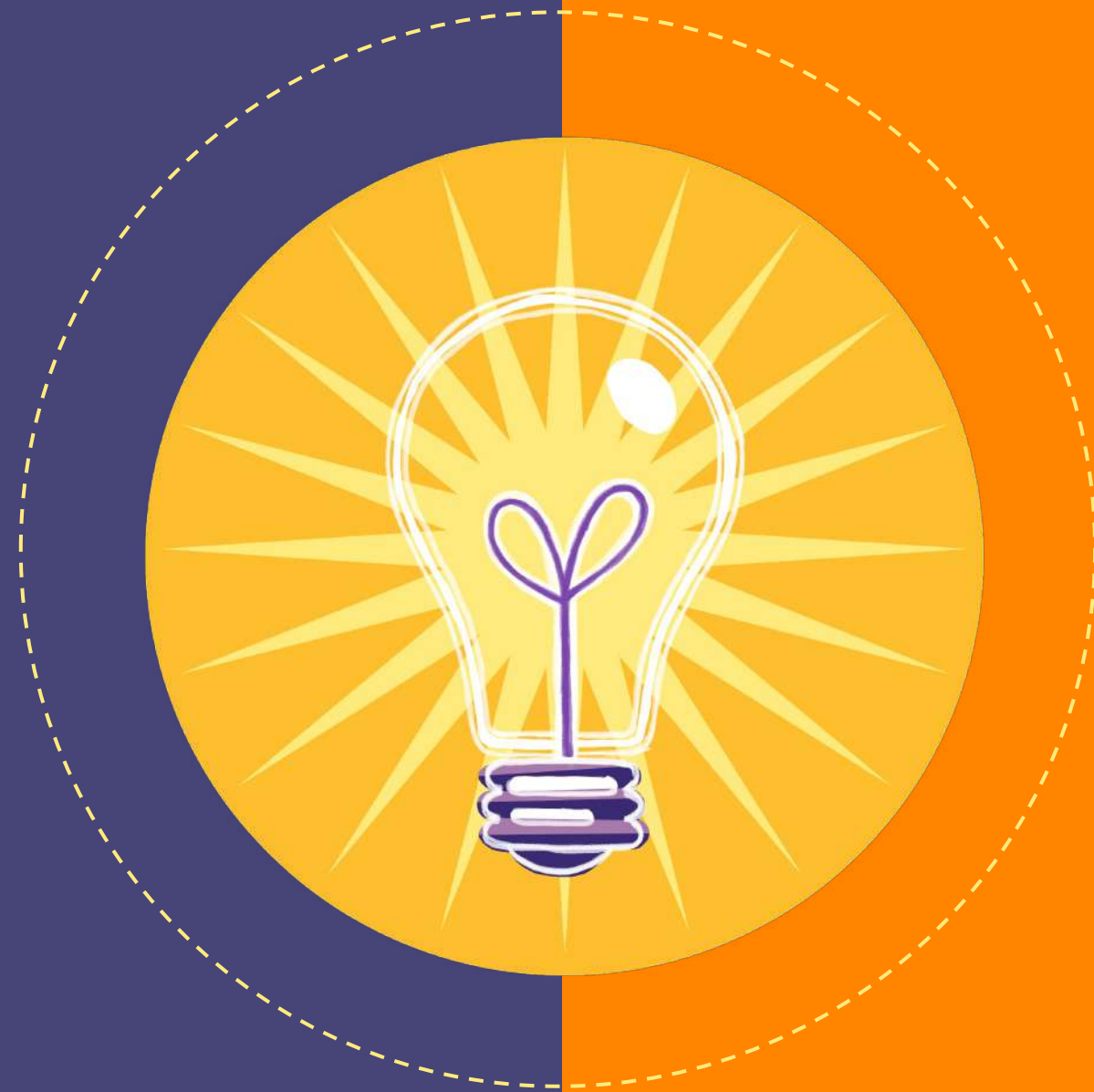
'By creating an online environment in which students can see and follow each other's progress, students are more able to benchmark their own development. It also means that more knowledgeable students can give feedback on the work of newer students, thereby providing different feedback 'voices' in addition to the tutors."

Phil says "Yes! One of the most satisfying things about a learning community is how much work it can do for you. One example is the way in which graduates and third year students can mentor first year students. Often, a problem posted on the student blog would be resolved over night or while I was working with another student."



#7

Learning communities reflect the way in which learning actually happens: across multiple touchpoints and in informal, non-campus spaces.



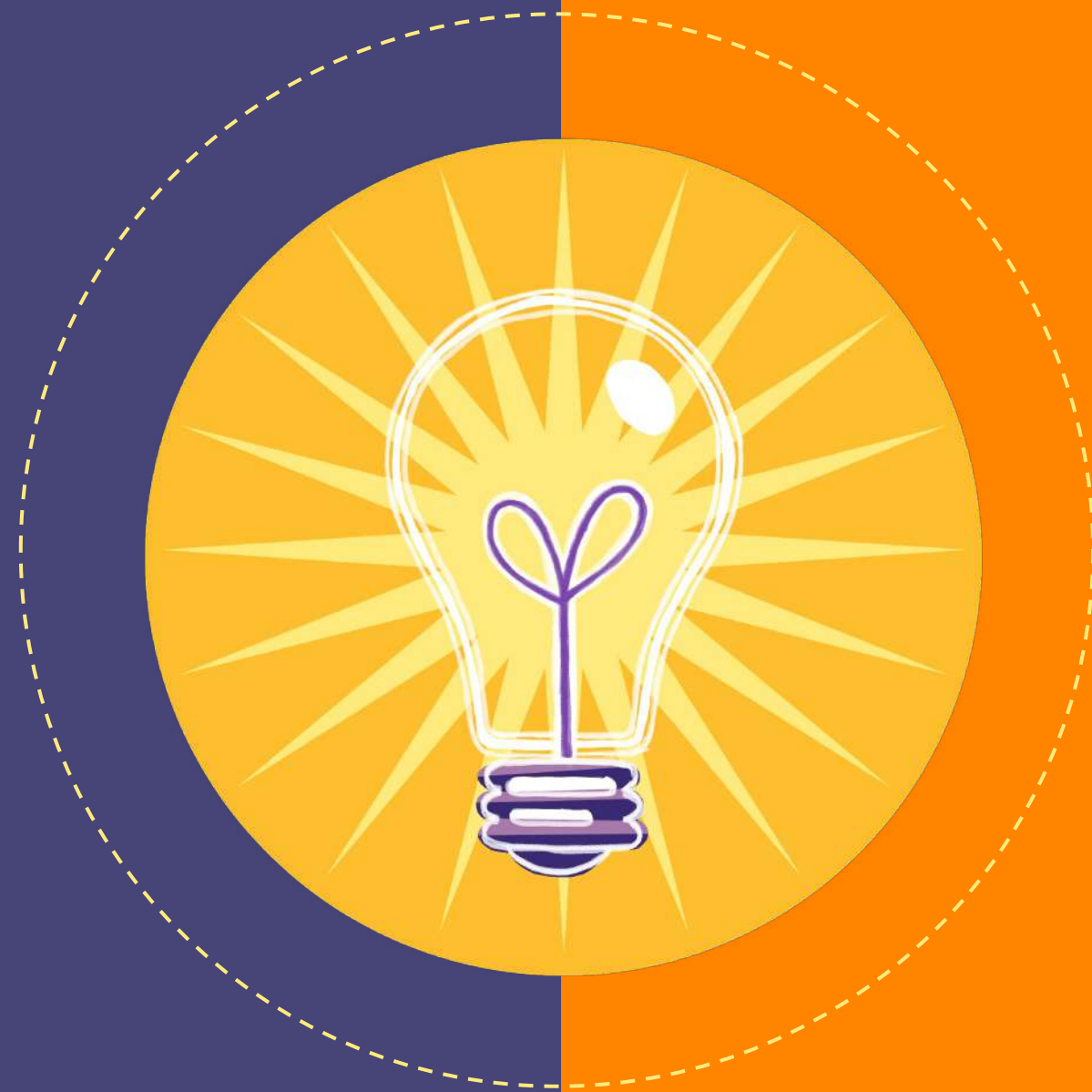
Tony says, “Way back in the 1980s, management theorist Donald Schön criticised the ‘high ground’ of professional practice education because it often bore little resemblance to the ‘swampy lowlands’ of the real world. Learning communities reflect how learning actually happens – through conversations between multiple people, in multiple places beyond the physical campus.”



Phil says, “I know when I first suggested using blogs there was some resistance from the IT Department. They wanted me to use the VLE exclusively, even though I knew a) the students were not gathering in the VLE, b) the functionality of the VLE was insufficient for our students’ needs and c) the VLE was locked-off from any real-world scenarios. This meant I couldn’t make those important arguments about professionalism and employability as they pertained to the ‘outside world’.”

#8

Learning communities make learning visible, enabling students to show what they are learning and benchmark their progress with each other



Tony says, *"One of the biggest educational studies of all time (Hattie, 2009) showed the powerful impact that peer learning has on students. By making learning much more visible through online blog posts, videos and comments, students have a much clearer sense of how they are performing in relation to their peers. And it also enables tutors to have difficult conversations about lack of progress with absolute confidence."*



Phil says, *"Exactly, Tony! The transparency of our community empowered all of us. It became so straightforward to point to examples of best practice, to motivate students, orientate them and mitigate against ambiguity. New students learned from more experienced students at an accelerated rate. Just as importantly, my teaching staff were able to assess student work confidently in the knowledge they were accessing the breadth and depth of a student's learning."*

Phil says, *“It wasn’t just the IT department who were worried about the course moving into non 9-5 online spaces. Senior management were worried. Even the marketing people were worried! Some staff, and even some students, had their concerns.*

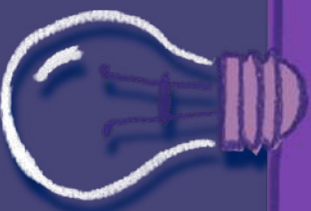
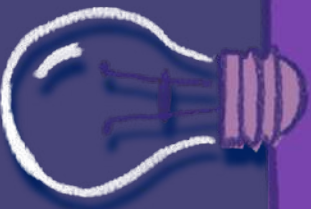
But while I had a bit of a fight to convince them of the benefits, it was a fight I won through pragmatic, student-centred learning design.”

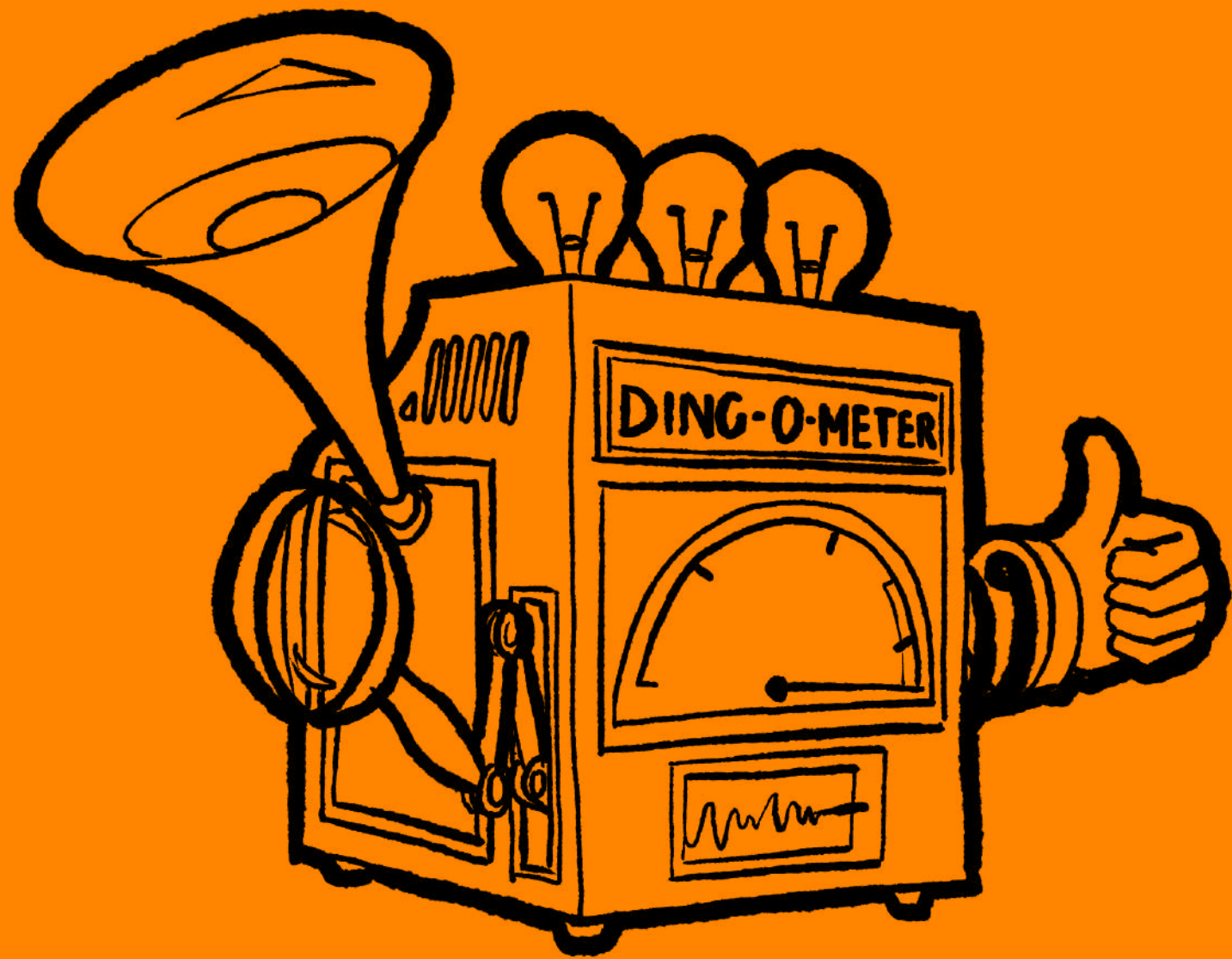


Dr Tony says, *“We know the emergency of COVID gave some course teams greater freedom in terms of re-thinking their use of online platforms and enabled them to make exciting, bold decisions. Now tutors are more used to teaching online, learning communities provide a practical response to students’ growing demands for a flexible blend of online and on-campus course delivery.”*

“It is time to revisit the factory model of mass education and consider how higher education curricula might be reimaged in response to more student-centred pedagogies and technologies... designing curricula around community can provide a way to subvert the traditional power relations in the teacher-student relationship and empower students to take greater control over their learning.”

(Reeves & Caglayan, 2019)





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to talk about?



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