

# [In (palloff and pratt, 2007, p. 26). building](https://assignbuster.com/in-palloff-pratt-2007-p-26-building/)

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In today’s scholastic landscape, educators recognize the value of technology and online collaboration for educationalenhancement and have all the means and tools to make optimal use of this technology. The emergence of modern communications and the advent of the internet are changingthe way education is conceived of, managed, and conducted (Shrivastava, 1999). These new learning technologies create opportunities for new educational experiences, including distance learning and online synchronous and asynchronouscommunication and networking. The potential of these technologies for educationis immense. Therefore, integrating these new advancements into our educationalinstitutions is important to enhance the educational process.

Advancements in technology and withthe internet have brought to the surface social networking and virtualcommunities (Chen, 2004; Ke & Hoadley, 2009). As a result, online learninghas achieved prominence in higher educational institutions and is currentlygaining popularity in K-12 education as well due to the availability affordedby technological advances (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). Online environments addmore value to the process of learning by offering students an ongoing learningplatform. They also provide other means for students to easily accessinformation and increase their knowledge base. In addition, such environmentsare “ space and time independent” as they are free from the constraints of thetraditional classroom (Shrivastava, 1999, p. 699). This is, obviously, positivefor educational institutions and teachers alike because it allows learning totake place anywhere and at any time (Shrivastava, 1999). Much research has been conducted recentlywith regards to the importance and significance of the sense of community inonline learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p.

4). Outcomes of these studies, as explained by Palloff and Pratt (2007), give further support to previouslyheld notions that “ the key to successful online learning is the formation of aneffective learning community as the vehicle through which learning occursonline” (p. 4). Creating an online learning community “ allows for mutualexploration of ideas, a safe place to reflect on and develop those ideas, and acollaborative, supportive approach to academic work” (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 26). Building a community of learners inan online course transforms key features inherent in traditional learningenvironments.

Some of the radical changes brought to traditional educationalsettings by online learning include “ greater availability and accessibility ofinformation, engagement of different learning styles, and promotion ofincreased responsibility for teaching and learning” (Adams & Sperling, 2003, as cited in Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 4). Such changes make it imperativefor educational institutions and teaching staff to address the need to “ encompassthe development of new skill sets for teaching and the need to rethinkpedagogy, redefine learning objectives, re-evaluate assessment, and redefine staffwork roles and culture” (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 4). Learning communities andcollaborative activities have long been acknowledged for their advantages andopportunities, including the value they provide in enhancing the learningprocess (Oliver, Herrington, Herrington, & Reeves, 2007). Dialogue anddiscussion stemming from such contexts are important for the learning process, and the inherent collaboration in such communities provides tangible andcontinuous support to students (Oliver et al.

, 2007). Certain features ofonline learning help some students become more successful learners (Palloff& Pratt, 2007, p. 4). For example, introverted students find ample space invirtual classrooms to express themselves and participate constructively inonline discussions where they will not experience the social pressureassociated with face-to-face interaction in actual classrooms. Often, teachers can create andsustain collaboration in their classrooms through group-based activities (Oliveret al.

, 2007). However, this process might not be straightforward in a virtuallearning environment. Therefore, it is crucial to design a learning environmentand activities that can help students flourish in a virtual learningenvironment. However, the design of such an environment requires carefulplanning and understanding of how this environment is created and sustained asan ongoing learning platform. This article aims to look carefullyat online learning communities; how they are conceived and defined, the theoreticalassumptions implicit in this learning environment, how they can be created andsustained, the changed role of the teacher, and the emerging issues that mightaffect students’ engagement in online learning communities.