

Building Online Communities:

Review of literature
and key tips for
schools and kura



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Building Online Learning Communities

Review of literature and key tips for schools and kura

The Internet offers a wide range of possibilities and deep learning opportunities for ākonga. While often used as a tool for explicit teaching and learning, the Internet and the use of online learning communities also offer other opportunities. Schools and kura may use the Internet for connecting ākonga to their peers, kaiako, extra-curricular and citizenship opportunities, as well as alongside traditional teaching and learning to further enhance the school experience and prepare ākonga for an increasingly digital world and workforce.

This work is designed to guide schools and kura in building and maintaining online communities, thus enabling greater educational and social opportunities for ākonga. It will help schools and kura introduce (or formalise their use of) online communities to engage ākonga, providing a roadmap to successful online community creation to cover a range of learning areas and strengthen their delivery of the Digital Technologies Curriculum | Hangarau Matihiko. Literature and evidence will be used throughout to highlight points and ensure that schools are led by relevant research. The second to last section is dedicated to providing schools and kura with practical tips to strengthen the use of online communities.

Schools may use the information in this document to:

1. Understand what online communities are and why their usage is warranted
2. Identify learning and extra-curricular areas where online communities may be beneficial
3. Plan and implement online communities in specific areas
4. Maintain and improve (already) established online communities, following guidelines in research
5. Plan and mobilise ongoing support for kaiako to maintain civil, productive online communities
6. Identify and manage risks associated with online communities

Research and findings will be presented and used to formulate practical tips for schools and kura. The recommendations are intended for use by school leaders and kaiako to start the process of planning online communities or strengthen their current use. This may help to facilitate conversations on online communities and digital learning that they may then take further steps to consolidate and formalise. Readers may choose to go straight to the tips for kaiako in the second half of this document if they do not wish to engage with the literature background.

Throughout this report, the term kaiako is used to represent those staff who engage with teaching and learning with ākonga, including facilitating online learning and social spaces for ākonga. The term *instructor* is commonly used in research but is replaced with *kaiako* in this report.

The Case for Online Learning Communities

Establishing and strengthening online learning communities is important for schools working to strengthen their teaching and learning practices with a particular focus on the digital/online aspects of learning. We make three key cases for online learning communities:

1. Enabling online learning and the delivery of the Digital Technologies | Hangarau Matihiko curriculum
2. Enabling online remote learning, such as that experienced during COVID-19 lockdowns
3. Complementing traditional face-to-face learning

Enabling the Digital Technologies / Hangarau Matihiko Curriculum

The Internet is an exponentially growing tool, providing schools and learners with rich, multimedia opportunities to illustrate concepts, learn, and practice skills (Turvey, 2006). In a 2008 review, the OECD stated that digital technologies have the potential to change education and teaching in schools. Digital technologies are increasingly used in schools and it is important to “equip young people with the knowledge and competencies that would enable them to navigate in the online spaces and virtual worlds” (OECD, 2008, p. 13).

The prevalence of digital technologies in learning institutions sparked the need for the Digital Technologies | Hangarau Matihiko Curriculum, implemented in 2020. This curriculum includes opportunities to engage and create online, use technologies and media to find solutions, develop their skills online and engage in civic activities. Its implementation has, however, been a significant challenge for schools and kura.

In their thesis submitted toward a Master of Education, Rhodes (2020) investigated the adoption of the Digital Technologies Curriculum by kaiako. The results showed that kaiako struggled with curriculum integration and that professional learning was unclear, mis-integrated, and insufficient. Those with the confidence to do it, however, could overcome several of the negative experiences to successfully adopt the curriculum in their practice.

As is explained further in this report, online learning communities provide an opportunity to engage ākonga in the Digital Technologies | Hangarau Matihiko curriculum. This includes opportunities to engage and create online, use technologies and media to find solutions, develop their skills online, and engage in civic activities. Ākonga engage in such activities collaboratively with peers, kaiako, and their whānau. Online learning communities may be used as a tool for schools and kura to further their implementation of the Digital Technologies curriculum, increase its scope, and encourage collaborative work. They provide schools and kura with innovative opportunities to engage the curriculum while connecting with others.

Enabling Remote Learning Amidst COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of establishing accessible systems of online learning due to the rapidly changing manner of teaching and learning during this period. COVID-19 resulted in the temporary closure of schools nationwide and rapid uptake of online learning to keep ākonga engaged in learning through terms 3 and 4 of 2020 (and subsequent lockdowns) and when ākonga needed extended periods away from school due to sickness. The long-lasting negative consequences of school closures has resulted in schools moving their systems online at an unprecedented scale (OECD, 2020).

During this time, the GCSN conducted a review of schools' responses to the change to online learning and provided advice for schools and agencies for bridging the digital divide during this time. The digital divide refers to the gap between those who have, and those who do not have, access to the Internet and Internet-capable devices which is an issue of equity (van Dijk, 2006). The review by the GCSN found that very few ākonga spent the initial 2020 lockdown without a device (6.1% without) or an Internet connection (1.9% without), and 0.5% of the sample had neither a device nor Internet connection (GCSN, 2020). GCSN has continued to investigate and address the challenge experienced by some ākonga regarding accessibility to a suitable device and/or the Internet when learning at home.

With the disruption caused to education over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for schools and kura to consider their systems and resources to support online learning. This includes consideration of the technological infrastructure, tools and resources, and the emotional and social support given to ākonga to support their learning (OECD, 2020). Without adequate access to remote learning, those students will face larger learning losses than technologically equipped peers which will translate into deeper losses of lifetime learning and earning capabilities (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020).

The urgent shift to online learning has required schools and kura to consider how ākonga access their learning, communicate with their kaiako and peers, and interact with their school. Online learning communities are necessary to connect ākonga and kaiako to content and the functions of the school or kura.

Complementing Face-To-Face Instruction

While remote learning under the conditions presented by the COVID-19 lockdowns represented a necessary reliance on digital technologies to enable learning, online learning communities are also a means of complementing face-to-face instruction. The evolving nature of education and digital technologies has made a notable change to school culture (Davis et al., 2018). This changing educational landscape has seen a shift from traditional single-cell classrooms in favour of more innovative models of schooling where teaching is more collaborative and partnerships extend beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom or school (Davis et al., 2018).

Online learning communities offer a social element to online learning using digital technologies. Shea et al. (2006) state that interaction between students in online learning communities allows them to present their views, consider alternative views, consider the course material and integrate these ideas into existing cognitive structures. Learning with social presence online allows for deep learning experiences, similar to those afforded in the physical classroom learning environment.

This signals a participatory view of learning alongside acquisition. Learners not only absorb information, but engage with it, discussing and sharing ideas that develop their knowledge and the knowledge of those around them. Learning is inherently social in nature, as is the central concept of Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Swan & Shea, 2005). SLT is central to online learning communities because knowledge is distributed across groups and learning takes place among communities (Swan & Shea, 2005). Online learning communities allow for greater social learning outside of the physical boundaries of the class/school environment.

For schools to enable deeper learning, traditional face-to-face teaching and learning can be accompanied by online social learning as part of a community. In this way, schools can offer deeper learning experiences using technology and the Internet. Kaiako can establish and mediate online learning communities to encourage ākonga to participate in discussions, share ideas, share work and resources, and promote collegiality among ākonga. By modelling this behaviour themselves, kaiako develop a learning culture and sense of community that extends beyond the classroom.

Online Learning Communities Background

This section covers the background, literature and research of online learning communities, including the cultural shift that sparked interest in such pedagogies and the importance of social presence and community building that enable its success. The role of kaiako and purposeful design is also considered, before introducing the notion of Te Ao Māori. The following sections discuss the applications and recommendations for schools and kura to consider.

Cultural Shift

Online learning communities are defined by the idea that effective learning and the presence of a community are linked. A community is established when staff and students interact in a manner that demonstrates genuine caring, which then translates to increased teaching and learning efficacy (Brown, 2014). Initially, online learning communities were a means of combatting attrition and school dropout (Brown, 2014; DiRamio & Wolverton, 2006; Vesely et al., 2007). This is because online distance education has often been associated with higher attrition and poor retention (DiRamio & Wolverton, 2006) and attrition rates for online courses are higher on average compared to traditional face-to-face courses (Diaz, 2002). This has resulted in increased interest in online learning communities as a tool for keeping students engaged (Vesely et al., 2007), thus reducing attrition while enhancing teaching and learning.

Recent interest in establishing online learning communities likely relates more to the shifts in learning culture and the possibilities that they offer in connecting ākonga to learning outside of the physical boundaries of the classroom (Davis et al., 2018). This cultural shift includes how teaching has become more collaborative and how partnerships increasingly extend beyond physical school campuses. Technology and various pedagogies support collaboration across physical *and* virtual learning spaces. The increased availability and use of digital technologies supports online and blended learning and connects parents and whānau more to their child's school through web tools and social media applications. A cultural shift is also present in the global expansion of online learning with for-profit, not-for-profit, and mixed business models that enable learning over a network, whereas virtual schooling started as a sharing economy with open resources (Davis & Ferdig, 2018).

Social Presence and Community

Learning online requires careful consideration of social aspects; Social presence is foundational to learning online (Dikkers, 2018). A large-scale survey of secondary school students by Mulienberg & Berge (2005) found that a lack of social interaction was identified as the single most important barrier to students learning online. This includes a lack of communication with fellow students, the impersonal nature of online learning, fear of isolation, lack of social context clues, a lack of student collaboration, and a general preference to learn in person. In building and strengthening online learning communities, schools and kura need to consider how they build social presence.

Whiteside (2015) argues that social presence guides individual's meaning-making processes in online and blended learning. This includes five aspects of social presence:

1. Affective Association – how students and teachers show emotion online;
2. Community Cohesion – seeing the class as a community;
3. Instructor Involvement – how the teacher shows involvement in student learning;
4. Interaction Intensity – what ways and how often students interact; and
5. Knowledge and Experience – ways students share their prior knowledge and experiences with course content (Whiteside et al., 2017).

The third element, instructor (Kaiako) involvement, has been seen as more important than any other element with both ākongā and kaiako seeing the responsibility of creating online social learning environments resting with kaiako (Dijkers, 2018). They play an important role in creating the online community, facilitating discourse, nurturing ākongā, and motivating them to engage.

Central to the success of online learning communities is the fact that learning as a community enhances the learning of the community members (Hargis, 2005; Powers & Mitchell, 1997). Vesely et al. (2007) summarised key elements across research in online learning communities, finding the following 5 elements common across research:

1. A sense of shared purpose
2. Establishment of boundaries defining who is a member and who is not
3. Establishment and enforcement of rules/policies regarding community behaviour
4. Interaction among members, and
5. A level of trust, respect and support among community members

Several activities encourage a sense of community and belonging in a shared online space. Kaiako can utilise morning meetings, midday check-ins, and closing circles to create shared experiences (Peterson & Skadsem, 2022). Kaiako may facilitate ākongā to create a sense of community identity and participate in community events and socialisation activities that enable ākongā to belong to a group outside of physical class/school boundaries (Peterson & Skadsem, 2022).

Social presence and being a part of a community assist in engaging with learning material. In a survey of undergraduate tertiary students and the kaiako of their online courses, Vesely et al. (2007) found that respondents agree that being part of an online learning community assists with performance and learning course material. In particular, kaiako perceive the benefits of students relating well to one another and assisting each other with the learning of course material. They assert that the most important factor of an online learning community is the *presence in a community*, rather than being present simply to learn course material, “Learning communities involve a structured, supportive environment in which there is a purposeful, intentional interaction among members of the group. Additionally, there must be a level of trust, respect, and support present among community members” (Vesely et al., 2007, p. 242).

Kaiako Roles in Online Learning Communities

Due to the lack of face-to-face interaction and accompanying social components, it generally takes longer to establish a sense of community in online environments compared to traditional classrooms (Brown, 2001). Ākonga might not perceive their kaiako as the deliverer of education, compared to the computer acting as a social actor in computer-mediated learning (LaRose & Whitten, 2000). Because of this, kaiako play important roles in emphasising the social, personal, and collaborative aspects of online learning communities (Vesely et al., 2007). This means that kaiako in online learning communities need to be actively engaging their classes and groups online (Mandernach et al., 2006).

This represents the changing role of kaiako in the 21st century as the cultures of schools change. With learning becoming increasingly collaborative and schools and kura favouring innovative and blended learning opportunities, kaiako have new roles and responsibilities to support online learning (Davis et al., 2018). For example, kaiako will work collaboratively with others, requiring them to balance their individual teaching strategies with collective responsibilities to support learning. They will need to deliberately foster an online culture, construct online curriculum content, and administer assessments. As learning cultures and norms change, so too must the role of kaiako as facilitators of learning.

There is also a larger contextual difference in online education that is delivered through an exclusively virtual school (e.g. Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu) and a regular New Zealand school with a physical campus that combines traditional and online learning (Davis et al., 2018). This includes the collaboration, strategies, and pedagogies employed by kaiako to enable ākonga to connect to their learning and one another. This can be difficult in contexts where ākonga are learning exclusively online as they don't have the time each week to come together in person. Similarly, the COVID-19 lockdowns resulted in a cultural shift to learning exclusively online, and kaiako quickly needed to adjust to their changing roles and enable such connections without face-to-face contact.

Most important to online learning is the involvement of kaiako, including how they create purposeful interactions and provide opportunities for ākonga to connect with their peers and with kaiako (Dikkers, 2018). This includes how they facilitate discourse, nurture ākonga, motivate engagement, and use a range of online tools to build community. Providing spaces for ākonga to discuss learning and interact with kaiako and peers is particularly important for at-risk ākonga. Kaiako should organise specific activities that encourage interaction (Dikkers, 2018).

Mandernach et al. (2006) assert that kaiako in online learning environments need to be 'seen' to be perceived by students, and thus they must actively participate and facilitate online learning in an explicit, observable way. *Teacher presence* is thus an important factor in designing and maintaining online learning communities. Aviv (2000) states that online kaiako must encourage supportive interactive processes, allowing members to get to know one another, develop social

skills, and support one another. Vesely et al. (2007) state that active kaiako in online communities do the following things:¹

1. Encourages contact between students and instructor
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. Encourages active learning
4. Gives prompt feedback
5. Emphasises time on task
6. Communicates high expectations
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning

Kaiako should be models of positive, productive interaction through the above recommendations. Furthermore, in their survey of students engaging in online courses, Vesely et al. (2007) found that students rate teacher modelling as the most relevant thing to successfully building an online community, and College faculty rated interaction and dialogue as the most relevant. Kaiako should provide leadership and guidance by giving feedback, being available to discuss concerns, and contributing to chats and discussion boards. Heuer & King (2004) offer suggestions for online kaiako to enhance their presence and leadership:

1. Modelling expected behaviours and interactions
2. Encouraging students
3. Facilitating sharing and participation
4. Responding to students' concerns and establishing an environment of open communications

It is important to note that the changes observed in school culture with the proliferation of digital technologies and blended learning does not symbolise an isolated change event. Learning online will continue to evolve and co-evolve with schools and kura, their ākonga, and wider communities (Davis et al., 2018). Rather than moving between cultures, the change processes are continuous and must include ongoing self-managed learning for ākonga and kaiako. Changes need to be recognised and planned for, thus understanding and responding to culture and community online.

Purposeful Design

Also central to facilitating social interactivity and modelling behaviour is purposeful design. Shea et al. (2006) found a significant link between students' sense of learning community and effective instructional design, regardless of demographic variables. Garrison & Cleveland-Innes (2005) suggest that interaction is not enough, and structure and leadership are essential to facilitating online learning.

¹ Note that these recommendations, informed by other research, are specific to undergraduate tertiary students, but findings are applicable to engaging primary and secondary-aged students.

Shea et al. (2006) also suggest that the parameters of online courses need to be made clear to students. This includes communicating clear time parameters, such as due dates and deadlines, course goals, course topics, and instructions on how to effectively and appropriately participate. Much of what is important to online learning communities is true to offline learning environments, however, with an absence of face-to-face interaction, kaiako need to ensure they take the necessary steps to encourage participation and set clear boundaries.

Brown (2001) suggests building community purposefully in three stages:

1. Making friends online through interaction.
2. Community acceptance through long threaded discussion with class participants.
3. Camaraderie achieved based on long-term association and/or personal contact.

The research supports being purposeful and designing online learning communities to encourage ākonga to interact with one another, with their kaiako, and with course content or other content. Through being purposeful and proactive, kaiako can plan how and when online learning communities will support the Digital Technologies curriculum or other purposes.

Incorporation of Te Ao Māori

Karaka-Clarke et al. (2021) maintain that fostering ākonga engagement online is important to supporting online teaching and learning, focusing on the experience of Māori ākonga.

“He Awa Whiria: Braided Rivers” is a metaphor used by Macfarlane et al. (2015) to describe the two epistemologies at play in New Zealand. The first is mātauranga Māori, the body of knowledge from Māori ancestors including Māori worldview and perspectives. The second is knowledge. Each has mana, integrity, and legitimacy in online learning. There are areas where the braided rivers meet and diverge. Digital technology is a point where mātauranga Māori and western technology can converge to enhance outcomes for Māori (Karaka-Clarke et al., 2021). A Te Ao Māori perspective finds where these rivers meet for the benefit of ākonga, their learning, and building a community with them.

Karaka-Clarke et al. (2021) conducted focus groups with kaiako who had 10-20 years of classroom experience and had been involved in synchronous online delivery (although this was only for approximately 2-5 years). Online platforms offered quick and easy ways to contact and engage ākonga, however, kaiako felt they dominated social spaces and ākonga had reduced capacity to interact online. While kaiako were aware of the five cultural competencies of Tātaiako, they were not necessarily sure how they were implemented in online teaching and learning programmes. These five cultural competencies are:

1. Whanaungatanga – Relationships with students, school, and community, with high expectations
2. Wānanga – Communication, problem-solving, and innovation
3. Ako – Practice in classroom and beyond
4. Manaakitanga – Values of integrity, trust, sincerity, and equity
5. Tangata whenuatanga – Place-based, sociocultural awareness and knowledge

Ongoing work may be required to determine how these five cultural competencies can be implemented in online learning communities to advance teaching and learning opportunities for Māori ākonga.

Karaka-Clarke (2020) discussed the advancements in technology and online teaching methodologies and their impact on the teaching and learning of te reo Māori. Providing responsive practice to Māori ākonga comes back to wairuatanga (spiritual connectedness, sense of empathy, ambience, or presence) which manifests in different ways. Alexander (2022) found three overarching themes for engaging Māori ākonga in online learning:

1. Whanaungatanga – Building positive relationships
2. Kotahitanga – Working together respectfully
3. Manaakitanga – Caring, mutual trust, respect, and concern

These allow kaiako to build and maintain positive relationships with and amongst ākonga working in online environments.

Uses for Online Learning Communities

Primarily, online learning communities focus on learning, offering innovative and deeper learning experiences for groups of ākonga. This section explores the use of online learning communities for complementing traditional face-to-face teaching and learning as well as how they may help schools and kura with extra-curricular groups and connect like-minded ākonga.

Across online learning community uses, there are some similarities. The communities include shared goals and values, idea sharing and collective problem solving, questions discussion, collaboration, shared inspiration, and networking and social interaction.

School Class Groups

Kaiako may use online learning communities to connect ākonga to peers in their classes. This could be a junior secondary school class or could be a kaiako of a single subject to connect their ākonga more to their material. Some subjects may be more suited to this, such as media and English.

Kaiako can establish an online learning community to display work, communicate homework and deadlines, post notes and resources to accompany classwork, introduce and mediate discussions, encourage meetings and group work, and allow social aspects of the class to extend beyond the physical parameters of the classroom. For example, an English teacher may create an online learning community for their class to discuss themes in a book, download homework, share reading progress, ask and answer questions, etc.

Shared learning among ākonga and kaiako includes:

- Recapping things learned
- Asking and answering questions
- Collaboratively working on solutions to problems
- Discussing ideas in further detail
- Sharing and constructively critiquing ideas
- Engaging in conversation with other ākonga and with kaiako
- Providing and receiving feedback
- Sharing resources
- Cataloguing homework, deadlines, and key dates
- Organising class projects, activities, and events

These activities all allow students to participate in further learning while also engaging in the social aspects of education and building camaraderie.

This also allows ākonga to engage in aspects of the Digital Technologies | Hangarau Matihiko curriculum. Specifically, there are two areas of this curriculum: 1) Computational thinking, and 2) Designing and developing digital outcomes. Computational thinking is not necessarily the explicit use of technology to solve problems, but more the ability to express problems and formulate solutions using algorithmic thinking skills and understanding what is and isn't possible with computing.

Kaiako may consider the following in establishing online learning communities to support the use of the Digital Technologies | Hangarau Matihiko curriculum:

- What problems will the online learning community address?
- What technologies will ākonga use? (The hosting platform, social media, websites, smartphones, cameras etc.)
- How will ākonga use the online community to plan and implement solutions, and what steps might be involved?
- Where will data be stored, how will it be shared, and how will ākonga analyse and organise data?
- How will ākonga share and summarise their solutions and steps?
- Can these problems in the online learning community be used as evidence for Digital Technologies progress outcomes? <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/Technology/Progress-outcomes#collapsible1>
- How can technology and media be creatively used for solutions?
- How can the online community creatively and collaboratively use technology to make ākonga online creators?

Extracurricular Groups

Extracurricular groups at schools may benefit from online learning communities to connect ākonga of those groups with one another and with coordinators and leaders. This could include sports, cultural, social, arts, religious, environment, leadership groups etc. For example, an online community for the student council may be able to discuss issues and progress outside of meetings, sports groups may organise fundraisers and practice times, religious groups may share scripture and organise events, social groups such as LGBTQIA+ groups might socialise further online outside of meetings, organise meet ups and share media with one another.

Kaiako will often administrate these online communities, provide reminders, facilitate conversation, promote collegiality, and use the community as an opportunity to develop digital citizenship and promote civic engagement.

Online learning communities may be able to support the following in extracurricular groups:

- Recap lessons/meetings and provide minutes
- Ask and answer questions
- Organise meetings, fundraisers, and other events
- Communicate responsibilities and deadlines
- Share and constructively critique ideas
- Share resources and media
- Have social and collegial conversations and discussions
- Build and foster friendships

Connecting Like-Minded Ākonga

While not specific to a group in the school or kura, online learning communities may apply to connecting ākonga based on shared interests. For example, a community may be formed online to help those interested in a specific learning game, DIY/crafts, LGBTQIA+ ākonga who don't (yet) have a dedicated club or group, gaming groups, those who are friends and may benefit from something fun and creative outside of class time.

These may be facilitated by kaiako online, but may also be facilitated by the school but let the ākonga learn to manage these groups themselves. Such communities may allow ākonga to socialise and have fun without relying on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, or Tik Tok.

This can be difficult to administrate as it will be largely be outside of the jurisdiction of the kaiako or school, and ākonga will often create these communities/groups themselves without outside influence. In such cases, kaiako cannot monitor language, behaviour, bullying etc. These are discussed further in the risks section.

Tips for Establishing and Maintaining Online Communities

The following tips are informed from the literature discussed earlier in this report and are intended to provide schools and kura with ideas rather than provide a faultless roadmap. Schools and kura may use these tips to plan the implementation of online learning communities or help maintain those they currently have, consolidating their thoughts, values, and priorities and potentially formalising this into an action plan.

Establishment

1. Assess the needs and purpose of the online community

Schools and kaiako should assess what the needs are for the online learning community, i.e. learning, Digital Technologies skills, socialising, organising events, giving homework, starting discussions etc.

Once the need and purpose have been established, school staff and kaiako should determine what the values of the online learning community are, outlining the norms of behaviour for the community.

Key questions for kaiako:

- What is the key purpose of this community?
- What outcomes do I hope to achieve for ākongā?
- What opportunities are available through this online community?
- What value(s) will guide this community?

2. Determine the platform

Schools should carefully assess what platform the online community will be hosted on, i.e. the school intranet, an external provider, or a social media app such as Facebook Groups.

There are several considerations for what platform is best. If the school intranet is a viable option for engaging in discussions etc., then this is likely a good option as it can be used for other class/school activities.

Schools and whānau may wish to avoid social media such as Facebook Groups to reduce overall social media platform usage and discourage its use during school time. There may also be increased exposure to advertising, distracting, or inappropriate materials, and the rules of discourse on social media will be different from those of the school. Social media usage will also only be usable by ākongā over a certain age. A benefit of social media though is that ākongā already on social media will be on social media and using it often, thus are unlikely to miss updates

and discussions outside of school. External platforms may be preferable to avoid social media usage for learning purposes, but will often require ākonga to consciously sign in to then engage with materials and engage with their peers which they may be unlikely to do outside of school or without being prompted. Kaiako would need to incentivise the usage of external platforms to encourage participation.

Kaiako should also assess how easy or difficult it is for them to moderate content, to quickly mute or remove ākonga should the need arise and to receive notifications and monitor online communities so they may keep an eye on discussions and ensure they remain civil online.

Key questions for kaiako:

- How often will ākonga be expected to check the online community?
- Is it appropriate to host on social media or an external provider?
- How will I monitor content and discussion to ensure it remains civil?
- How likely are ākonga to regularly log in and check this online community?
- Do my preferred platforms align with the values of the school/kura?

3. Set rules for engagement

In order to maintain civil online environments, schools and kura should formalise the rules for engagement, listing rules of how ākonga are to behave in the online environment. This will include things such as the use of rude/insulting language, bullying, sharing inappropriate content, and maintaining the rules and values of the school/kura.

Depending on the platform, there may also be rules of platform use regarding language, types of speech, and inappropriate material.

Kaiako may also discuss the expectations of online learning such as how often ākonga should log in and/or check content, how they should contribute, and what kinds of contributions are encouraged. Note that kaiako will need to be models of these rules so should only ask what is realistic given the boundaries of the school day.

Key questions for kaiako:

- How can I ensure ākonga remain civil in this environment?
- What will I do when things become uncivil?
- How often will I check and monitor interactions online?
- What rules should be set surrounding language, speech, and inappropriate material?
- What kinds of interactions between ākonga will be helpful for the purpose of the online community?

Kaiako Responsibilities

4. Creating a culture/atmosphere of openness, respect, and trust

Kaiako will be responsible for creating an atmosphere that enables conversation, learning, discussion etc. They may start by introducing themselves (if they are not already known), the community and its purpose. This is an opportunity to break the ice, introduce the purpose of the online learning community, and open discussions for ākongā to start conversing.

Throughout discussions, kaiako should encourage open dialogue, keep conversations active, and encourage ākongā to participate. They should be present to remind ākongā they are there, will reply, and will respect their views and contributions.

Key questions for kaiako:

- What expectations will ākongā have of me in the online environment?
- How can I align ākongā to the purpose of the online community early?
- What activities might help break the ice and encourage ākongā to participate?

5. Starting and engaging in discussions

Where discussions are a part of the online learning community, kaiako should proactively start discussions that engage the learning material, encourage participation and support multiple viewpoints to be presented and discussed.

Key questions for kaiako:

- What material is appropriate for discussion online?
- How can I instigate these discussions?
- How can I encourage ākongā to contribute to discussions?

6. Maintain civility

Online civility is essential to be maintained, and should already be captured in the values and rules of engagement of the online learning community. Kaiako can ensure that civility is maintained by modelling this behaviour themselves, muting or removing ākongā who fail to maintain civility, and ensuring language remains appropriate and ākongā treat one another with respect.

Key questions for kaiako:

- What language is appropriate and inappropriate?
- What will I do when someone acts inappropriately?

7. Providing feedback

Kaiako should be providing prompt feedback in a way that encourages participation while also deepening learning for ākonga. This will largely be in the form of replying to discussion comments but may include private correspondence. Kaiako may commend a contribution made by ākonga, encourage them to say more, or make a constructive critique about their response. Kaiako should be wary of how they provide constructive feedback when other ākonga are witness to the feedback.

Key questions for kaiako:

- What feedback should ākonga receive?
- How often should I provide feedback on their contributions?
- How will I communicate positive and constructive feedback?

8. Providing helpful information, resources, and media

The online learning community is a good repository for information and media relating to the online community. Kaiako may upload resources and encourage ākonga to open and engage with materials.

Key questions for kaiako:

- What materials should I include in the online community?
- How will it be shared and downloaded by ākonga?
- How can I avoid students posting/accessing inappropriate material and media?

9. Modelling behaviour

Across actions, kaiako should model good social and participatory behaviours. They should initiate discussions, reply to others, answer questions, and act in a polite, constructive way.

Key questions for kaiako:

- How can I model positive behaviours to ākonga?
- How can I be constructive without being too critical or rude to others?

10. Provide opportunities for activities

Without activities available, ākonga may be stagnant in the online learning community, thus it may be beneficial to provide multiple opportunities for ākonga to participate. This can include discussion topics, questions, polls, quizzes etc. that invite ākonga to participate, share their thoughts, and interact with one another.

Activities, including discussion topics, should allow for diverse talents and interests, and different ways of learning to ensure that all ākonga participating have an opportunity to work to their strengths.

Key questions for kaiako:

- What material can be covered with activities, and what kinds of activities?
- What are some of the key strengths and weaknesses of the ākonga in the community?
- How can the activities cater to different strengths and weaknesses?
- How can weaknesses be developed through online activities?

Risks

Many of the risks associated with online learning communities are those also experienced with online learning and engaging with the Digital Technologies curriculum. These are briefly discussed below, as well as some mitigating factors to reduce risk where possible.

Risk	Mitigation
<p>Teaching staff have limited availability for additional tasks</p>	<p>A very common reason for kaiako not engaging in activities such as additional online learning opportunities is the lack of compensation and recognition for working outside of work boundaries.</p> <p>Online communities will not likely be implemented or implemented successfully by staff who are over-extended or perceive themselves to be over-extended with additional work. Introducing online communities should be planned and integrated with the curriculum so that it occurs as part of teacher and team planning. That way the time required to uphold the online community is planned as part of the delivery of a programme and staff can organise their time in advance.</p> <p>However, moderating an online community will likely require additional time, and this may mean less time for other tasks. This is particularly true as kaiako roles increase in scope and complexity. This needs to be considered alongside how learning is increasingly moving online to ensure that kaiako are treated fairly as administrators of online communities and are not expected to work beyond what is expected in their role.</p>
<p>Teaching staff will work outside of their allotted working hours</p>	<p>Moderating an online community may result in teachers monitoring and contributing to the online environment in their evenings after they have finished school and related activities. As part of the rules of engagement, teachers should determine when and how they will engage with the online community, outlining rules such as no replies from the teacher after 4.00pm so that teachers can have control over their contribution.</p> <p>Responsibilities should be made clear prior to establishing an online community and adjusted as necessary. Kaiako should be clear with should leaders regarding their abilities to be an administrator of online communities and not extend themselves beyond what is appropriate or required of them.</p>

<p>Teaching staff do not have the competence to successfully manage an online community</p>	<p>Online communities are more likely to be managed by staff who are already tech-savvy, and to make staff run online communities without competency will create unnecessary stress for them and is less likely to be successful.</p> <p>Where possible, schools should provide staff with targeted Digital Technologies PLD so they have the sense of self-efficacy to engage with online communities successfully. Those who do not feel competent to run online communities should not be made to do so until they feel they are comfortable and skilled.</p>
<p>Online communities results in increased reliance on devices during school</p>	<p>As a curriculum tool, online communities require the use of digital devices for engagement but should be planned deliberately alongside traditional face-to-face instruction or similar. Kaiako will be responsible for managing how much online communities are used as a tool for engagement, ensuring that their ākonga do not spend too much time online during school time.</p>
<p>Online communities results in increased use of social media (thus increased exposure to harmful material)</p>	<p>Online platforms will not necessarily require social media or may be supported by social media (e.g. sharing YouTube videos) as schools may use other platforms. The introduction of Te Rito may also be used to host school groups without needing social media platforms such as Facebook.</p> <p>Kaiako should monitor the material to ensure nothing harmful is being shared or distributed, and if social media is being purposefully used, kaiako should make efforts to limit its usage.</p>
<p>Online communities lose engagement</p>	<p>Without regular use, the online community will stop being an engaging learning and social tool. It can also be expected that naturally kaiako and ākonga will gradually lose interest in a single online community with time and exposure. Kaiako should ensure they regularly update the platform, host interesting topics and discussions, upload materials and media, and actively encourage ākonga to use them. Without purposefully planning and using the online community for ākonga engagement, the community becomes transactional and ākonga stop engaging.</p>

<p>Online learning communities are not monitored or administrated by school/kura staff</p>	<p>In some cases, online learning communities may be made by ākongā, for ākongā without influence from kaiako. This can make it difficult to monitor the language, behaviour, activities etc. that occur. In worse case scenarios, bullying may occur unseen by kaiako who are unaware that an online learning community has become a toxic environment for some ākongā.</p> <p>Online bullying can be a difficult thing for schools and kura to solve, particularly as they aren't in control of what ākongā do online outside of school or won't be privy to private conversations and interactions that lead to bullying. While school culture can address bullying behaviours, it is important that wellbeing and anti-bullying messages are woven into the curriculum and that the school takes measurable action to reduce bullying in all facets.</p>
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