

ONLINE Communities

Session 2

Learning context



The previous lesson looked at the concept of communicating online. It's fair to say that people will naturally connect with other people that have the same interests. This lesson investigates what these communities do and how they work. We can help children risk assess what they see, making good decisions that keep themselves safe. Children at this age should not be involved in online communities, and so we can teach them why this is right. It's about life experience, knowledge and the law.

Key points and content



It is very easy to connect online. When people communicate in this way, we lose quite a lot of the expectations related to meeting people. People can be who they want to be and can say things that they may ordinarily not say face to face. This means that online communities can be very influential in both positive and negative ways. We hear and see more and more about online communities in the news and through other sources. In fact, online communities are everywhere. So before we look at what makes an online community, maybe we should consider what a community is and how one works?

This is important because



Being part of a community once again brings some responsibility. At the end of the day, we are responsible for our own actions online and so we need to assess and risk when considering the prospect of being involved in a community. People will start their own communities online as well as joining existing established communities already. People online will also look to recruit for their community and there will be organisations that do this for both positive and negative reasons. Being part of any organisation is human nature as human beings will always seek to belong to groups. Think about it, how many offline communities do you belong to?

Investigate



This is the 'Wikipedia' definition for 'community'

'A **community** is a social unit of any size that shares common values, or that is situated in a given geographical area (e.g. a village or town).'

Do you think that this definition still fits or have those geographical and social barriers now been removed?

If we add the word 'online', this is what we now get.

'An **online community** is a virtual **community** whose members interact with each other primarily via the Internet.'

This changes everything. As you would expect, the level of risk is now much greater and needs careful consideration. Let's investigate the kind of communities that we may find online. What do you already know?

Question: Why would you join an online community?

Question: Who else could be in this community?

The risks



Online communities grow all of the time. Sometimes they are managed or 'administrated', but most of the time they are not. People will form groups and discuss things that they have in common (or that they think they have in common?). This can be highly dangerous if individuals or groups of individuals intend to cause harm.

Between 6th and 11th August 2011, thousands of people rioted in several London boroughs and in cities and towns across England. The riots followed the death of Mark Duggan who was shot by Police on 4th August. What started out initially as a peaceful protest in Tottenham on Saturday 6th August organized by family and friends which ended at Tottenham Police Station. The gathering, against the families wishes descended into chaos with looting, arson and attacks on the Police. Initially the Riots were confined to London boroughs, but from 8th - 10th August the riots spread to other parts of the country including Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Nottingham, West Bromwich, Bristol, Lincoln, Manchester and West Yorkshire. The riots were the first major public order events in this country where the role of social media was put under the spot light with questions eventually being asked in Parliament. Social media was in part blamed by some as one of the major factors for the spread of the riots and therefor seen as a negative impact. In particular Blackberry Messenger was identified as an organizing tool because of its ability to send **group messages** rather than individual ones. The messaging system allowed the greater ability to coordinate mass gatherings. £300 million pounds of damage was caused with over 450 people eventually arrested.

Activity



Let's profile!

Here are 6 community profiles. Each community has an online profile. This is what someone has created remember, and so you must assess **who** is in the community, **where** the community is hosted online, **what** the community do, **how** they do it and **why**.

Example:

#Goonerfanz

Loving Football! Arsenal through and through. Love to chat about all things Arsenal and to cheer on the team, home and away. Facts, figures and footy chat. 27,282 members.

Who: Arsenal football fans.

Where we could find this community? Twitter, Facebook other social networks and chat rooms.

What: Why: Because they like to talk about their team with other fans.

How: Online. No suggestion at the moment that it involves contact, which could seriously increase any risk.

Why: Because the group like football, and Arsenal. This is quite common.

Risk? Sounds lower because there's no contact mentioned or private details, it sounds like football chat. Although there could be bad language or aggressive posting.

Try these on your tables:

#PHOTOMEANDYOU

Want to share photos? Find what you need here! 1,477 members

Leedsdancegroup

For older people who love to dance. We meet every Friday at the social club and jive together. Why not take a look at our website and see if you want to come along. Over 50's only! 212 members

PeopleAgainststheWorld

We believe the world needs to change. If you believe this too then join us in our fight to make the world right. 'BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY'. 13,800 members

YEAR 6's ONLY!

You can join if you are in our class, otherwise no chance! 12 members

KidzTVshow

Fans of the most popular children's music show on television. Chatting about the latest trends and sharing together. 2,835 members

All of the above have some degree of risk although some should not be considered at all. Think carefully about who could be in the group and why they would join. Quite often the risks are hidden, and require real investigation. What if someone in the year 6 class group decides to make mean remarks? Remember, if you choose to join any community, there will always be some risk. Any community could potentially have people that you do not know, and for this simple reason we can't truly be sure about who they are or what they do. Your profile can also be viewed by others. What does a photo or your comments say about you and does it make you safe? Also think carefully about your username. Is it smart to use your full, real name?

Summary



It would be entirely your choice to join any community once you are legally old enough to fully understand the dangers. You do not have to join anything at all, and you may well be more than happy with the real life groups that you are in. But in the years to come it's good to know how to risk assess any online are forum, because they are very common. These groups can be well intended, or highly dangerous, but one thing that we know for sure- once again we don't really know who we are talking to. If anyone ever contacts or messages you directly asking you to join or to chat, we must seriously consider why they would do this. This is often how dangerous situations can begin.

Once again, most apps and sites that host communities recommend that you have to be 16 to join, and this is for good reason. It's all about knowledge and responsibility. Once you are 16, you can be found guilty and charged by the police.

The benefits



Following the riots, an interesting situation occurred from a terrible situation. Social media was used to organize the cleanup operations in the aftermath with an iconic spontaneous photograph taken on a mobile phone showing defiant communities raising brushes in the air of one clean up activity. The photograph was posted on social media and went viral around the world with many news agencies and media outlets using the image. People gathered and worked together to clean up the towns and cities and to prove that the criminal behaviour of a few would not be allowed to dominate. This reaction was coordinated online and across the country, many other forums and online communities work together positively to look after real communities. Whilst online communities can effectively support positive change and life styles, this proves that the greatest form of social networking is working together in real life.