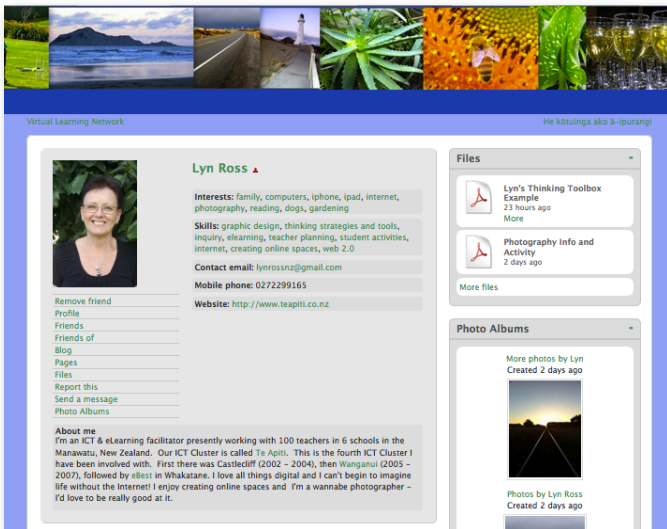


Stage 1: How to start a group in the Virtual Learning Network

The VLN starts with you. It starts with sharing enough information about yourself to connect with others online.

1. What does a full profile look like?



The screenshot shows a user profile for Lyn Ross. At the top, there is a banner image with several small photos. Below the banner, the profile includes a profile picture of Lyn Ross, her name, and a dropdown arrow. The profile details are as follows:

- Interests:** family, computers, iphone, ipad, internet, photography, reading, dogs, gardening
- Skills:** graphic design, thinking strategies and tools, inquiry, elearning, teacher planning, student activities, internet, creating online spaces, web 2.0
- Contact email:** lynrossnz@gmail.com
- Mobile phone:** 0272299165
- Website:** <http://www.teapiti.co.nz>

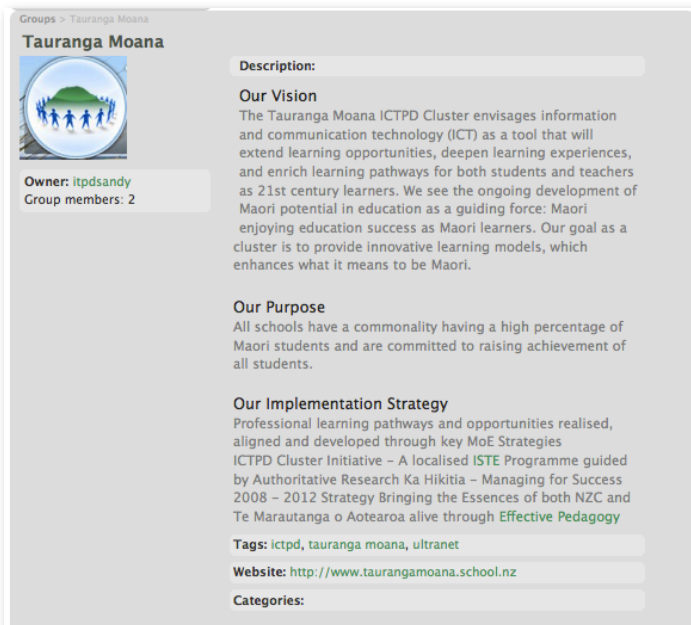
On the left side, there is a list of actions: Remove friend, Profile, Friends, Friends of, Blog, Pages, Files, Report this, Send a message, Photo Albums. Below this is an "About me" section:

About me
I'm an ICT & eLearning facilitator presently working with 100 teachers in 6 schools in the Manawatu, New Zealand. Our ICT Cluster is called Te Apti. This is the fourth ICT Cluster I have been involved with. First there was Castlecliff (2002 - 2004), then Wanganui (2005 - 2007), followed by sites in Whakatane. I love all things digital and I can't begin to imagine life without the Internet! I enjoy creating online spaces and I'm a wannabe photographer - I'd love to be really good at it.

On the right side, there are sections for "Files" and "Photo Albums". The "Files" section shows two files: "Lyn's Thinking Toolbox Example" (23 hours ago) and "Photography Info and Activity" (2 days ago). The "Photo Albums" section shows "More photos by Lyn" (Created 2 days ago) and "Photos by Lyn Ross" (Created 2 days ago).

To enable people to get a better idea of who you are online, you will need a full profile – name, title, role, image/avatar or logo, areas of expertise, interests, links to blogs or online resources.

2. What does a full group description look like?



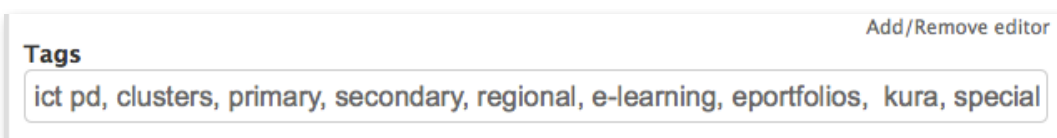
The screenshot shows a group description for "Tauranga Moana". It includes a group icon, the group name, and the following information:

- Owner:** itpdsandy
- Group members:** 2
- Description:**
- Our Vision**
The Tauranga Moana ICTPD Cluster envisages information and communication technology (ICT) as a tool that will extend learning opportunities, deepen learning experiences, and enrich learning pathways for both students and teachers as 21st century learners. We see the ongoing development of Maori potential in education as a guiding force: Maori enjoying education success as Maori learners. Our goal as a cluster is to provide innovative learning models, which enhances what it means to be Maori.
- Our Purpose**
All schools have a commonality having a high percentage of Maori students and are committed to raising achievement of all students.
- Our Implementation Strategy**
Professional learning pathways and opportunities realised, aligned and developed through key MoE Strategies
ICTPD Cluster Initiative – A localised ISTE Programme guided by Authoritative Research Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success 2008 – 2012 Strategy Bringing the Essences of both NZC and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa alive through Effective Pedagogy
- Tags:** ictpd, tauranga moana, ultranet
- Website:** <http://www.taurangamoana.school.nz>
- Categories:**

For people to be able to find your cluster and want to connect with your group, they will need some detailed information.

For example, cluster name, icon, who belongs to the group, primary, secondary, kura, location, interests and focus areas (literacy, SOLO, Te Reo, LMS, e-portfolios) and links with cluster resources.

3. What does good tagging look like?

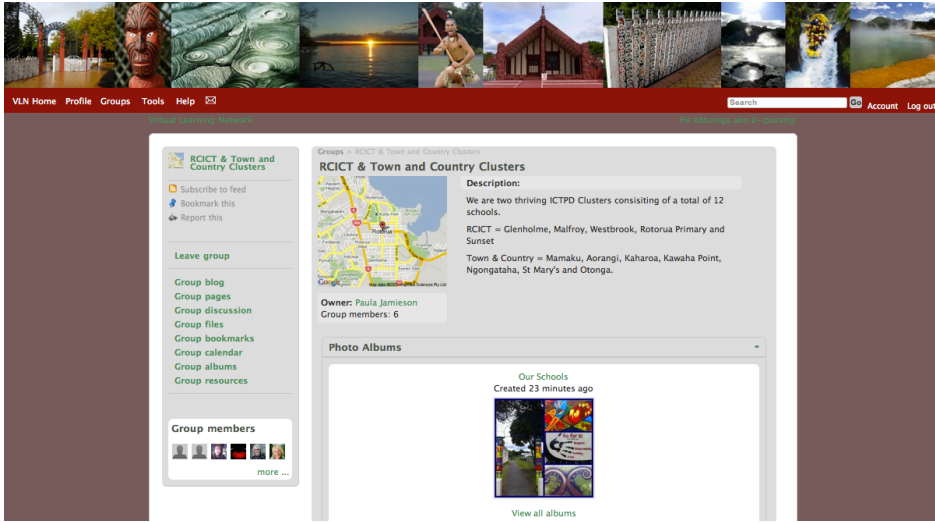


The screenshot shows a tagging interface. At the top right, there is a link "Add/Remove editor". Below it, the word "Tags" is displayed. A text input field contains the following tags: "ict pd, clusters, primary, secondary, regional, e-learning, eportfolios, kura, special".

Every time we add a tag we are building a database of searchable words. The experts say, "freeform keywords - while there is a dropdown with this option that gives people suggestions as to tags that are already added that may be what they are looking for,

this is not a fixed taxonomy and should be totally organic - developed by the people and for the people." So always remember to tag.

4. What does a unique area look like?



This really is about dressing your space up and making it unique and identifiable. Using colour schemes, logos or images to make it your own - much like displaying work on the walls of your classroom.

5. Who is here to help?

[Tessa Gray](#) 's title is Online Facilitator – National Blended e-Learning PLD Programme. She works for CORE Education in the ICT PD project as the online facilitator. A big part of her role is to broker relationships and connect cluster groups in this space. She will be able to help make connections for clusters online - as well as support cluster personnel to create groups, upload summaries and share material. Don't be surprised if Tessa wants to be your friend.

6. Readings

For some more ideas on how to engage with others online, try reading, **Some tips for making the most of belonging to an online community**, in Gina Revill's blog post [Nine tips for online community newbies](#).

There is also a great reading on the importance of early stages of socialisation and building an online, networked community, **Facilitated networking and group formation in an online community of practice**. Most notable from this research was,

- The importance of us all understanding what early stages of COP development looks like
- Ensuring individuals have a sense of belonging and a sense of community identity
- Understanding how we can make individuals feel like they belong with a sense of identity, "bonding and relatedness"
- Acknowledging temperament types is important, but not overwhelming in the data, therefore strategies employed by facilitators to support entry into the social network is important
- Having supportive partnerships to help people feel accepted and connected in the network
- Strong relationships are paramount. This includes the importance of a detailed online presence and, "...strong identification."

http://acce.edu.au/sites/acce.edu.au/files/pj/journal/AEC_Vol_25_No_1FacilitatedNetworking.pdf

More tips on Stage 2 (potential, use, /private material, tips, tricks, good examples) to come.