

**How do teachers use digital technologies to support their own work and professional learning?**



**Do teachers have their own online professional learning networks (PLN)?**



**Which online resources do teachers find useful or very useful for supporting their teaching?**



**What is a PLN?** PLN stands for Personal (or Professional) Learning Network. This usually involves an individual creating their own "network" of educators and other people from whom they seek advice, ideas, resources, to support their professional practice. PLNs can involve both online and offline relationships and communication, and often includes social media platforms. For more on PLN see: <http://gifted.tki.org.nz/For-schools-and-teachers/Professional-learning-support/Professional-Learning-Networks>

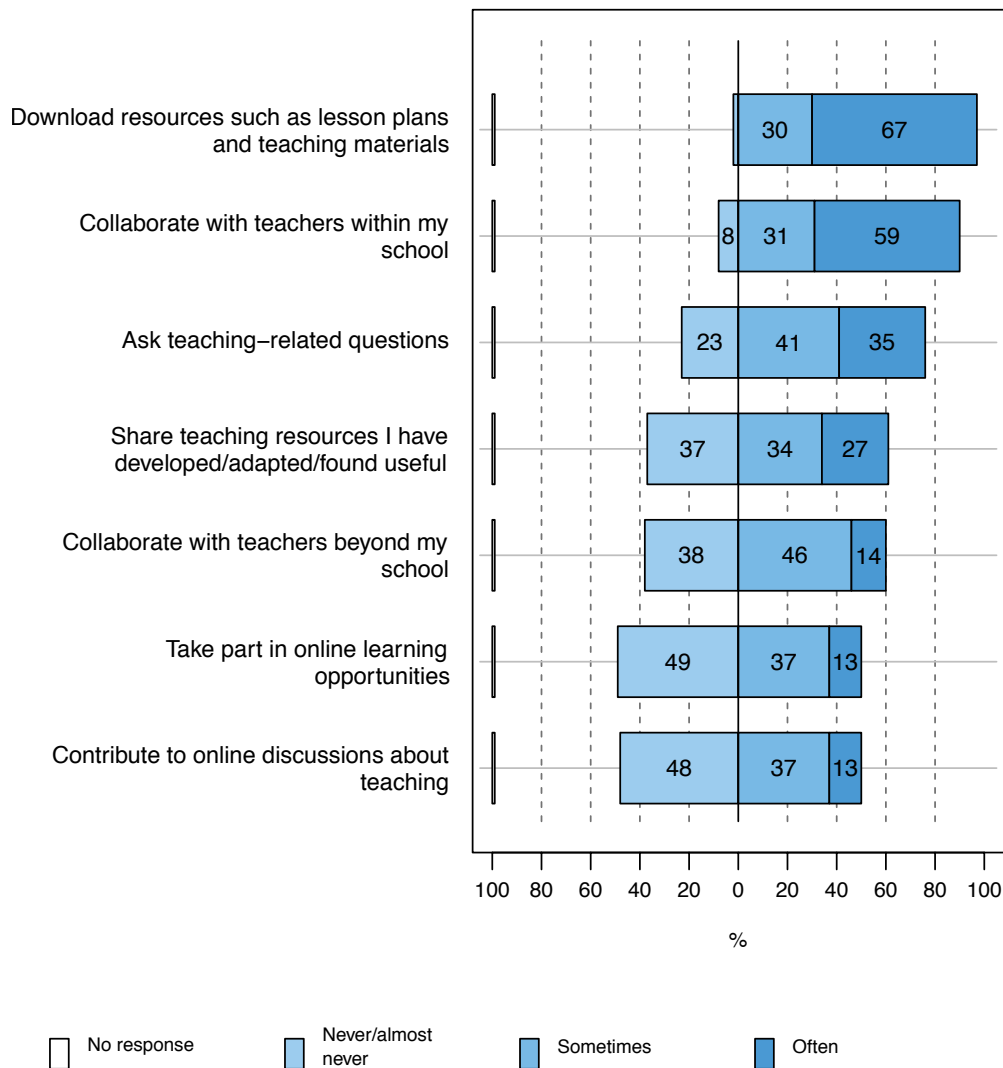
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# Teachers' use of digital technologies to support their own work and professional learning

The previous chapters have begun to develop a picture of how primary and intermediate schools are utilising digital technologies to support students' learning. But to what extent are teachers utilising digital technologies to support their own professional work, including extending their own learning and digital networks?

We asked teachers to indicate how often they use various online technologies to support their work and professional learning (see Figure 8). Most teachers say they often or sometimes use online technologies to download resources or collaborate with teachers in their school. It was somewhat less common for teachers to say they go online to ask teaching-related questions, share teaching resources, or collaborate with teachers from beyond their own school. Just under half said they never or almost never took part in online learning opportunities or contributed to online discussions about teaching. However, a small percentage (13%) said they did each of these things "often".

FIGURE 8 How teachers use digital technology to support their work and professional learning (n = 771)



We also asked teachers to estimate how many people they regularly connect with online as part of their own professional learning networks (PLNs). A professional learning network (or personal learning network) usually involves an individual creating their own “network” of educators and other people from whom they seek advice, ideas, and resources to support their professional practice. It is important to note that PLNs can involve both online and offline relationships and communication. However, our question specifically asked about online connections, in order to investigate whether teachers were using the affordances of digital technology to connect and network more widely. As shown in Table 9, more than a third of teachers (37%) say they have no online PLN. Just under half (49%) say they regularly connect with between one and 20 people online as part of their PLN. Just 11% of teachers indicate an online network of more than 20 people.

TABLE 9 **Number of people teachers regularly connect with as part of their online professional learning networks (n = 771)**

Number of people	Teachers %
None, no online PLN	37
1–20 people	49
21–50 people	7
More than 50 people	4

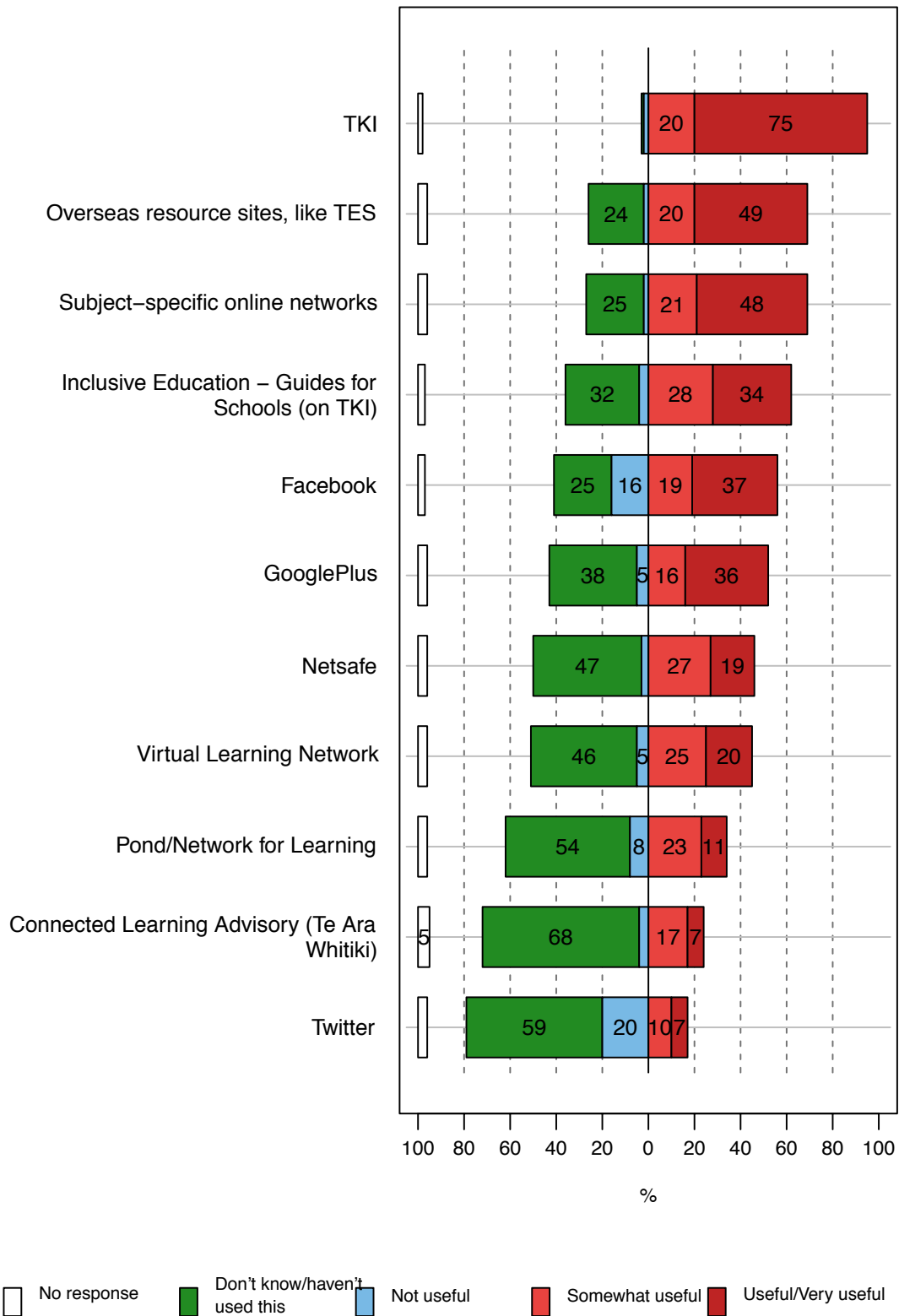
## Online resources teachers use to support their work

We asked teachers to indicate how useful they found a range of websites and online resources in supporting their teaching. The list of sites and resources was compiled to include a range of key New Zealand-specific online resources developed or supported by the Ministry of Education, as well as a few common social media platforms that teachers might use to share or discuss teaching and learning (see Figure 9). The most useful sites, according to teachers, were TKI (75%), overseas resource sites (49%), and subject-specific online networks (48%). The next most useful sites or resources were Facebook (37%), Google+ (36%), and the Inclusive Education guides for schools on TKI (34%).

Most of the online resources shown in Figure 9 were deemed “not useful” by around 2%–5% of teachers. However, more teachers indicated three online resources they consider not useful: Twitter (20%), Facebook (16%), and Pond/Network for Learning (8%).

Aside from TKI, reasonably large proportions of teachers said they didn’t know or hadn’t used various online resources listed in Figure 9. Around a quarter said they hadn’t used overseas resource sites, subject-specific online networks, or Facebook. Just under half didn’t know or hadn’t used Netsafe (47%) or the Virtual Learning Network (46%), and over half didn’t know or hadn’t used Pond (54%) or the Connected Learning Advisory (CLA) (68%). In the case of CLA and Netsafe, the key target audience for these services may be people within schools who have a leadership or decision-making role with respect to digital technologies, although both provide resources and advice that could be used by any teachers. In the case of Pond and VLN, both are intended to be for all educators, and provide spaces where teachers can find and share resources as well as discuss teaching and learning.

FIGURE 9 Usefulness of selected online resources, reported by teachers (n = 771)



## Summary

The findings in this chapter suggest that most New Zealand primary and intermediate teachers use digital technologies to find resources and teaching materials, and to collaborate with colleagues within their schools. Teachers are less likely to go online to discuss teaching and learning or to seek out online professional learning, though a small percentage of teachers (13%–14%) do this often. If teachers have an online PLN, this most often involves connecting with between 1–20 other people on a regular basis, and more than a third indicated they have no online PLN.

Three-quarters of teachers find TKI useful for their teaching. Amongst other online resources and websites that teachers might be expected to use, there were quite a few teachers who hadn't used these sites or resources, or didn't think they were useful.

Why aren't more teachers using these online resources, or going online to seek out PLD opportunities? Is it a matter of time pressure, lack of awareness of the resources that are available, or a perceived lack of relevance or usefulness for teachers' needs? Are teachers content with the material they can find on TKI and therefore don't feel any need to utilise other resources? Are teachers' PLD needs and interests being sufficiently well-met by offline learning opportunities that they don't see value in seeking online professional networking and support? While our data cannot answer these questions, they could be useful discussion questions for teachers, school leaders, and those who seek to support teachers and schools online.