



Personal Learning Network

What is it?

A Personal Learning Network (PLN) is the collection of people with whom you engage and exchange information. Kate Klingensmith identifies them as the group of people who contribute to your knowledge and understanding of topics in your field and beyond. PLNs have been around forever; they generally include family, friends, and colleagues. As web applications have become more robust, your PLN can easily grow using tools like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Ning thus expanding your network to include people from across the globe. The tools make it easy to find, connect with, and engage social contacts, peers, authors, experts and anyone with similar interests.

Why is it Important?

Both instructors and students will quickly see the value in developing a Personal Learning Network. As budgets for conferences and coursework are cut, a PLN allows you to access informal learning opportunities on your own terms. Because links and resources are shared constantly, a well-developed PLN is an easy way to stay up to date with educational trends and practices. Additionally, PLNs facilitate conversations and unique perspectives that you may not have on campus. A PLN provides a platform for you to make a contribution to your field.

Pros...

- Develop contacts and conversations with colleagues all over the world.
- The opportunity to establish a “digital footprint” for your work and extend your reach.
- Model life-long learning for students and increase your understanding of educational topics and trends.

Cons...

- There is so much good information and opportunities for collaboration, it can be overwhelming.
- Internal motivation is necessary to get and stay involved in conversations.
- It can be hard to manage all of the different tools.

How to Use them...

Get your PLN started with a couple of free tools, check them frequently, and share your resources and expertise. Before you know it, your professional development will be on overdrive!

Twitter: “Follow” experts in your field so their updates appear in your feed. Start by harvesting links and resources and when you are ready to make a contribution, make a post in 140 characters or less. <http://twitter.com/>

Ning: Allows you to create your own social network for free. Or you can join one that has been started by others, there are many focused on education and higher ed; College 2.0 or Educators PLN are good places to start. <http://www.ning.com/>

Blogs: Educators and industry experts all over the world are sharing their expertise via blogs. Organize their RSS feeds for easy reading. Start here to locate blogs worth reading: <http://www.blogcatalog.com/>

Wikis: Many collaborative projects maintain wikis for the community to contribute to. The Horizon Project report comes out every year and much of the work for it is done on a wiki. Consider making a contribution to a project of interest via their wiki. http://horizon.nmc.org/wiki/Main_Page

For Further Reading...

“**Your Personal Learning Network Made Easy**” is a blog post that explains a PLN and identifies many good Web 2.0 tools to get it going. Kate Klingensmith also explores the stages of adoption. <http://tinyurl.com/olousp>

“**7 Things You Should Know About Personal Learning Environments**” is an Educause document which presents another perspective on Personal Learning Networks. <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7049.pdf>

Will Richardson Web 2.0 expert discusses the importance of a PLN for both faculty and students: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QynwIVQs0K0>

“**Twittering Not Frittering: Professional Development in 140 Characters**” from Edutopia magazine. <http://www.edutopia.org/twitter-professional-development-technology-microblogging>