Building Your Personal Learning Network (PLN)

Step One: Establish Your Home Base

Whether you use a dedicated *feed reader* [Google Reader (google.com/reader) or Bloglines (bloglines.com)] or a *personalized homepage* [iGoogle (google.com/ig) or Netvibes (netvibes.com)], you will need a place to gather all of your information in one place!

Step Two: Start Small

The pace of information on the Internet can be overwhelming at times, so we recommend that you start small. You can use a *blog search engine* [blogsearch.google.com or technorati.com] to find a few blogs on topics that interest you, or you can start with our small list below that focuses on technology, leadership, and the future of schools:

- http://weblogg-ed.com/
- http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/
- http://dangerouslyirrelevant.org/
- http://coolcatteacher.blogspot.com/

Please also keep in mind that many modern web sites also offer feeds of their information; look for the *RSS Feed icon* [🔶] on sites such as CNN, NPR, the University of Illinois, local newspapers, and many others to subscribe!

Step Three: Grow Slowly

After a few weeks of monitoring your new personal learning network (PLN), you should be ready to expand its reach! One of the best ways to grow is to find the blogs that you find most valuable, and see who is influencing the authors. Most bloggers keep a *blogroll* of the sites which they read most often; you can find these lists by visiting the web sites for the blogs. Subscribing to these influencers now expands your network, and allows you to continue to grow in the topics that most interest you.

Step Four: Expand To Other Sources

In addition to the blogs that are providing the foundation of your *PLN*, there are many other information sources that can provide essential content and connections. Remember to look for the *RSS Feed icon* [🔶], so its easy to add to your *feed reader* or *personalized homepage*.

Microblogging: Twitter (twitter.com), Plurk (plurk.com)
Social Bookmarking: Delicious (delicious.com), Diigo (diigo.com)
Podcasts / Social Media: iTunesU (itunesu.com - access content through iTunes), Academic Earth (academicearth.com), YouTube (youtube.com), TeacherTube (teachertube.com)
Web-based Conferences: K-12 Online Conference (k12onlineconference.org), TED (ted.com)

For example, you can use the same methods to add your Twitter users to your PLN; start with these users [twitter.com/mcleod, twitter.com/EDPressSec, twitter.com/P21CentSkills, and twitter.com/ISBEnews], and grow the same way! Each of these Twitter users has a community of influencers - mine these lists for your PLN gold!

Step Five: Join a Community

Another important step in building your PLN is immersing yourself in a ***community of practice***! There are several ways to use social networking sites to connect yourself to people and information. For example, you should join the Educator's PLN community (edupln.ning.com) to find more resources for building your personal learning network. The Classroom 2.0 project (classroom20.com) has brought together educators from around the world that are interested in the classroom of tomorrow, and has quickly become one of the most vibrant and active communities of educators! Finally, you can also find communities of practice on the social networking sites that you already use; Edutopia (facebook.com/edutopia) has recently developed an active community on Facebook and provides inspiration and information for what works in education!

Step Six: Participate!

The final - and often most challenging - step in building a personal learning network is participation. Remember, the connections that you have been establishing are with people just like you! And it is the collaborations of these networks that are its true strength - the sharing of ideas that help to build your practices and beliefs!

Start by commenting on a blog post from one of your PLN blogs! Join Twitter and start sharing some of your own ideas! And lean on your community for help - they were once beginners too!