

Personal Learning Networks (PLNs)

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This presentation will cover:

1. What is a PLN?
2. Examples of how educators are using online tools
3. Three popular tools for building your PLN

What is a PLN?

- The collection of people with whom you engage and exchange information.
- Your PLN can easily grow using online tools – LinkedIn, Twitter, Ning, and Delicious

So, what is a pln?

PLN stands for Personal Learning Network and it is the group of people with whom you engage and exchange information. They are the group of people who contribute to your knowledge and understanding of topics in your field and beyond. Not too long ago, your PLN was mostly limited to your friends, family and co-workers.

Now, as online networking tools become more popular, you can easily expand your PLN to include professionals across the globe. Tools you can use to develop your network include tools such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Ning and even Facebook.

How educators use online PLN's

- Professional development
- Locate resources for their courses
- Integrate technology into their teaching

Examples

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Here I have some examples of how educators are using their online Personal Learning Networks.

One common reason teachers use online tools to expand their network is for professional development. You can easily connect with professionals in your field by joining a Ning network or following them in twitter. You can also stay up to date on topics of interest by joining a Ning network or subscribing to blogs. And, using online tools to allows you to connect with a much larger group of people than you would normally be able to connect with

Teachers are also using their networks to locate resources for their courses. If you use a social bookmarking site, like Delicious, you can search for interesting websites to share with your students. If you are part of a Ning network you can share lesson plans and educational videos with other members

And, teachers are using their networks to integrate technology into their teaching. A teacher who is a member of the classroom 2.0 Ning network used the network to locate Skype partners for her students in turkey so that they could practice their English with other students.

I also found a wonderful list of examples posted on Sue Water's blog. Sue Waters is the editor of Edublogger and she writes about educational technology. On her blog, she asked teachers to post comments describing how they are using personal learning networks. There are many great examples and I have chosen three to share with you.

How educators use online PLN's

"Using my PLN helped me to join with other teachers from across my state to complete a collaborative project. I read a Twitter from a fellow ITRT from the other side of Virginia. I checked out the Voice Thread link that she had posted. It was a project I knew my teachers and students could use to their benefit. I contacted the teacher and our students were able to collaborate together to increase learning. From the first contact to the end of the project was a span of five days! Now I have a contact for future collaborations. "

– [Karla Karr, Instructional Technology Resource Teacher](#)

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How educators use online PLNs

"My students get a better teacher when I take the time to learn from other professionals and refine my teaching practices. Also, I connect my students with experts from my network whenever possible. Videoconferences with scientists & business people, job shadowing experiences, guest presenters, webchats, email exchanges, etc..."

– [Andrew Knoll, High School Math/Science Teacher](#)

Popular tools

- Twitter (microblogging)
- Ning (social networking)
- Delicious (social bookmarking)

What is Twitter

- Social networking and microblogging service
- Send and read short messages known as tweets
- Send and receive tweets via the [Twitter website](#), text message or an external application

The first tool I am going to go over is Twitter.

Twitter is a free social networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers who are known as followers. All users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, text message or external applications.

Why Use Twitter

- Quickly access a stream of links, ideas, opinions and resources from a hand-picked selection of global professionals
- Share an idea and get instant feedback
- Stay up to date on topics of interest
- Attend a conference virtually (#tag)
- Develop a sense of classroom community
- Learn to express yourself in 140 characters or less!
- [The Twitter Experiment – UT Dallas](#)

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I've listed some benefits to using Twitter. These include:

The ability to quickly access a stream of links, ideas and opinions from global professionals.

The ability to share an idea and get instant feedback. If you post a question to Twitter you will immediately get responses from others in your network. If you subscribe to Twitter on your cell phone you will receive that message instantly, wherever you are, as long as you have your cell phone with you.

Twitter can help you stay up to date on topics of interest. If you set up your Twitter account so that you receive updates via text message you can track a specific event or word. For example, if you track the word "Starbucks" you will receive all messages that contain the word "Starbucks."

You can also use Twitter to receive updates on conferences that you can't attend. Many conferences now have Twitter hashtags. Hashtags are a short word that users attach to their tweets and other users can search for the hashtag to receive posts related to the conference. At the TED conference this past February in California, the hashtag was #TED. If you search for #TED on Twitter you can read the latest updates (and avoid paying the conference fee).

If you use twitter in the classroom it can help develop a sense of classroom community. Your students will get to learn more about each other and will feel more comfortable around each other. Using twitter in the classroom can also encourage conversations to continue outside the classroom.

Finally, you will become very good at expressing yourself in 140 characters or less!

I have included a link to a short video called the Twitter Experiment. This video shows how a history teacher at the University of Texas is using Twitter with her students.

What is Ning

- A platform for creating your own social network
- Add forums, videos, photos, events and blogs and more to your network
- Network members can message and friend each other
- [College 2.0](#)
- [Classroom 2.0](#)

The next tool I want to go over is Ning.

Ning is a platform for creating your own social network. You start by naming your social network and choosing a combination of features to add (photos, videos, forums, events, etc.). You can then customize your social network's appearance and launch it! People who join your social network will automatically have a customizable profile page and will be able to message and friend each other.

Why use Ning

- Connect with professionals in your field
- Discuss topics related to your field
- Share lesson plans, educational videos and other resources
- Create your own social network or join an existing one

Here I have listed some benefits to joining a Ning network.

When you join a Ning network you can easily connect with other professionals in your field and have discussions with them. You can have discussions with other members through the forum, through an online chat, or by email.

You can share lesson plans, educational videos and other resources. Ning network members often upload lesson plans, videos and other media to the site.

You can start your own social network. Some teachers are developing Ning networks for their classrooms as a place for students to connect and share information with each other.

What is Delicious

- Social bookmarking service
- Save, manage, tag and share bookmarks from a centralized source
- [Delicious video](#)
- [Delicious website](#)

The last tool I am going to discuss is Delicious. Delicious is a social bookmarking service that allows you to organize your bookmarks online. Instead of bookmarking websites on your computer, you bookmark them on the Delicious website. You can organize all of your bookmarks using tags and you can access these bookmarks from any computer. You can also share your bookmarks with other Delicious users.

I have included a link to an excellent, very short, video that describes how a teacher can use Delicious.

Why use Delicious

- Connect with other educators and view their bookmarks by adding them to your network
- Share valuable resources with colleagues and students
- Search for bookmarks related to a specific topic

There are many reasons why you might want to use delicious. Some reasons for using delicious are:

To connect with other teachers and view their bookmarks. If you add people to your Delicious network you will be able to see all of their bookmarks. Viewing the bookmarks of your colleagues is a great way to find out about new websites and online resources that might be of interest to you.

You can share websites and online resources with colleagues and your students. If you want to share several websites with your students during a class lecture, adding those websites to your Delicious page is a great way to do that.

You can search for bookmarks related to specific topics. Delicious has a search function where you can search for bookmarks that are tagged with certain words. When you search for a tag, Delicious will return a result that includes any of your bookmarks tagged with that word, and any other bookmarks added by other users that are tagged with that word.

And, you can access your bookmarks from any computer.

Advice for starting your PLN

- Start slowly and find mentors to help you
- Share as much as you take
- Ask as much as you answer
- Try new tools before you decide they're not worth your time
- Life long learning is the key!

From [Sue Waters wiki](#)

Starting your PLN for the first time can be challenging and I have listed some tips here that might make the process a little easier.

Start slowly and find mentors to help you. Choose just one or two tools to start with. If you have a colleague who uses online networking tools you might want to ask them for some advice.

Share as much as you take. Sharing your thoughts can be as simple as commenting on someone's blog post. If you belong to a Ning network you could start posting some of your videos or media and sharing your lesson plans and ideas with other members.

Ask as much as you answer. The more questions you ask the more you will benefit from your network. For example, if you maintain a blog you can ask your readers question and ask them to share their thoughts and opinions.

Try new tools before you decide they're not worth the time. When people first hear about twitter they often think it's not worth their time but many educators and professionals are actually finding it can be very valuable.

Advice for starting your PLN

It's really important that you use these tools for your personal learning first before using them with your students so you gain greater understanding of how to use them effectively and to realize their importance for empowering personal learning! (Sue Waters)

Additional Resources

- Twitter:
 - <http://academhack.outsidethetext.com/home/2008/so-you-want-to-microblog-twitter-with-your-students/>
 - <http://academhack.outsidethetext.com/home/2008/twitter-for-academia/>
- Delicious:
 - <http://academhack.outsidethetext.com/home/2006/delicious-hack/>