



Connection Reflection

PLNs . . . What Are They?

PLNs are personal learning networks. They've been around forever. We just never seem to have leveraged them in education as we do today. Think about gathering all of your mentors in one place. That is one way of thinking of PLNs. The Internet has become that one place in the digital age. Personal, professional, individual learning takes place on a daily basis. All you need to do is develop the connections necessary. Hopefully this newsletter will give you an idea where you can start connecting to other incredible educators.

On Personal Learning Networks and Lifelong Learning

By: **Dr. Henry Thiele**
President



Dr. Henry Thiele

For years we have been saying that we need to prepare our students to be lifelong learners, while at the same time not really knowing what that means for us. In education we used to be able to gain our skills in undergrad classes, refine them through grad classes, and maintain them through institute days and occasional professional development opportunities. However, the world is changing much faster than it did before. Just as the 10:00 news is no longer a substitute for 24-hour news channels, periodic staff development is no longer appropriate for lifelong learners. That being said, how is it possible to find high quality opportunities to learn

and grow? To do this our understanding of learning opportunities needs to change, from a model where we used to wade into the pool of

knowledge to one where we continually drink from the river of information. Over the past ten years the Internet has dramatically changed the way information is available to us, mostly due to the dynamic connections and conversations with groups of people that share similar interests and experiences. Social tools like Facebook, Twitter, Ning, and Diigo have allowed us to create asynchronous communities that contribute a wealth of information to a crowd. This crowd sourcing

takes the efforts of many to develop collections of resources and ideas that would be impossible for a single individual to compile. The easiest way to become an effective lifelong learner is to find some of these crowds on the Internet and join in.

A great place to start is [Classroom 2.0](#). Don't worry if you are overwhelmed at first. If the idea of jumping onto a website such as Classroom 2.0 bothers you, know that there are distinct stages everyone goes through when becoming part of an online network.

The first stage is usually referred to as "lurking", and although it is not a flattering term, it is socially acceptable online. Think of it as standing on the edge of a group at a dinner party where you are

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Special points of interest:

- Try Classroom 2.0 as a starting point to your PLN.
- Details and topics for the upcoming Special Education and Technology Conference can be found on Page 2. Mark your calendar and bring a friend.

The Power of Networking for Special Educators

By: **Judy Okazaki**
Executive Director



Judy Okazaki

What is a PLN and What Does It Have to Do With Professional Development?

The power of networking is unquestionable no matter what your field of work. The more people with whom you have relationships and can talk to about issues related to your work, the more you can expand your knowledge base, ask questions, find answers and rethink ideas and positions you might have on various issues. You can get lesson plan ideas and news of what's happening. And a personal learning network can give you instantaneous answers. The term PLN (Personal Learning Network) has become popular due to the social networking that is now possible on the Internet thanks to "Web 2.0 tools."

A PLN is a group of people that you stay in touch with individually and collectively through one or more types of Internet sites. A few of these sites are: Twitter, Facebook, Linked-In, Plurk,

NINGs, Diigo, Delicious as well as various blogs. You may not have previously known or ever meet the people that are part of your network. Yet you get to know each person and who to depend on for different types of information. Just as with any relationship with friends,

there will be people with whom you have strong and frequent interaction; others who are valuable but with whom you may connect less frequently.

A PLN offers you an informal way of engaging in professional development. You may also engage formally in professional development in face-to face meetings and presentations, through on-line classes or

webinars and by attending virtual conferences, also online. Both the formal and informal forms of professional development are valuable.

Building a personal network takes time, but the benefits can begin almost immediately. One hint for beginning is to select one site to start with. Within Twitter, Facebook, or Diigo, you will set up an individual network. As a "novice," you may connect to most anyone who wants to connect to you. However, as time goes on you will find individuals in your network who have the "same goals, needs, interests, motivations and

problems as you." ([From Personal Learning Environment Building To Professional Learning Network Forming](#), Malinka Ivanova, The 5th International Scientific Conference Elearning and Software for Education , Vol. 9 No. 20, April 2009).

This year SET Connections will continue to address the topics of social networking, PLNs and professional development in our newsletters, on our website and at our meetings. Stay tuned!

Learners create connections and develop a network that contributes to their professional development and knowledge.

[Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age](#), International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning, Vol. 2 No. 1, Jan 2005

First Annual SET Connections Conference . . . May 1, 2010 Special Education-Technology: A Partnership for Student Success

Join us for a morning of Professional Development

Topics Include:

- Personal Learning Networks and Professional Development for Educators in Special Education - Getting Started.
- Connecting With Other Special Educators Online Made Easy.
- Supporting Students in Special Education with Visual Learning Techniques.
- A Roundtable Discussion: How to Collect Organize and Share Data with Teachers, Data Collection for IEP Goals; Research Based Intervention.
- Addressing the Reading and Writing Processes for Special Education Using Technology.

Conference information on Page 4 of this newsletter and at www.SETConnections.org

Register at: www.SETConnections.org

Nope . . . Not for Me!



Alice Schmitz

By:
Alice Schmitz
Director of
Education and
Professional
Development

Not for me . . . that
Facebook and
Twitter stuff . . .

nope! I'm not getting involved in all that. I don't have time, I'll get a computer virus; or worse yet, someone will steal my identity. That is not a chance I want to take! All too often these notions surface when educators think about using social networking tools; and, ultimately, gaining professionally from a personal learning network. I totally understand. It is definitely a choice you make. However, let me point out a few of the benefits:

- You are learning the skills many of your students already have. I don't care if you are educating students of special education or gifted education—they know about social networking!
- You are connecting with other



TECH & LEARNING
presents
TECH FORUM CHICAGO
Insight and Innovation for Technology Leaders

Join us for a day of networking
and professional development

Friday, April 23, 2010 | Eaglewood Resort | Itasca, IL

SET Connections members save!

Enter source code CH10SET and save \$109 off on-site registration

Click [here](#) to register!

professionals—just watch who you invite and who you choose to accept as your friends. Bet you observe this piece of motherly advice in your face-to-face life—or should be . . . she taught you this when you were five!

- It's fun to meet new people. Teachers are social. You will enjoy meeting new people, reading, and discussing new ideas.
- Have information at your fingertips. With a personal learning network, you need only "connect" with the group for information, best practices, new ideas, etc. I am always amazed at how

quickly answers are posted to questions posed.

Having been to a lot of conferences, I get the idea of professional development and personal learning networks. It was fun to be with other educators learning new things, discussing ideas. It was fun to meet people face-to-face that you read or heard about. How are online personal learning networks different? Let's see . . . less expensive, always available, tailored to your needs/interests. H-m-m-m. Maybe this is something you should think more about!

From Lurking to Contributing to Creating . . . All Part of the Process

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surveying the group waiting for the right moment to contribute to the conversation. Once you start adding to the conversation, you will start to find your niche.

Next, you will become a contributor on certain topics—those with which you feel comfortable. Logging on occasionally and contributing to a conversation, adding a teaching tool, giving an example of your success in the

classroom will help many. It will also help you! You will come away with a wealth of information once you begin contributing and others agree/disagree, pose questions, or even suggest ways to better the original idea. Eventually others will turn directly to you for information.

The final step is somewhere down the line. You will be looking for information around a topic where no community has yet to form. At this point you will have

the opportunity to create a new community and release a new stream of information.

Becoming part of an online community may sound difficult to some of you, ridiculous to others, and, hopefully, tempting to still others, I would challenge you to give it a try. I am willing to bet you will not only feel positive about being part of a personal learning network, but you will also enjoy the experience!

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Connecting
Special Education and
Technology

Join Us

Log on to our website at
www.setconnections.org
OR
Email us at
info@setconnections.org
for information

REGISTER NOW

For
The **FIRST** Annual SET Connections Special
Education-Technology Conference
Saturday, May 1, 2010

8:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Maine South High School
1111 South Dee Road, Park Ridge, IL 60068

Keynote Speakers: Meg Ormiston and Dr. Henry Thiele
Variety of Breakout Session Presenters

Cost: \$20

Three CPDUs may be obtained for attendance

Registration, Updates, and Additional Details available at
www.SETConnections.org

Personal Learning Networks

Some links to more information
about PLNs from others on the
web:

[The Innovative Educator](#)

[David Warlick—Warlick's
CoLearners](#)

[Once A Teacher: Your
Personal Learning Network
Made Easy](#)

. . . and don't forget your
colleagues and friends!

Dates of Interest

Here is a list of some other conferences that may interest you.
Check the website or link for more information.

- April 18-20, 2010—**Illinois Rehab Association 54th Annual Conference**, "*The Hills Are Alive with Rehabilitation*", at Eagle Ridge Resort and Spa in Galena, IL. Contact Jan Koch for further information, janet.koch@illinois.gov Click [here](#) for a link to more information.
- April 23, 2010—**Tech Forum** (sponsored by *Tech & Learning* magazine). Eaglewood Resort, 1401 Nordic Road, Itasca, Illinois 60143. SET Connections is one of the partners for this conference which is targeted at technology leaders throughout the Midwest. For more information, click [here](#). (See page 3 of this newsletter for the SET Connections discount code.)
- May 1, 2010—**Special Education-Technology: A Partnership for Student Success**. (Sponsored by SET Connections). See above or click [here](#) for more information.