

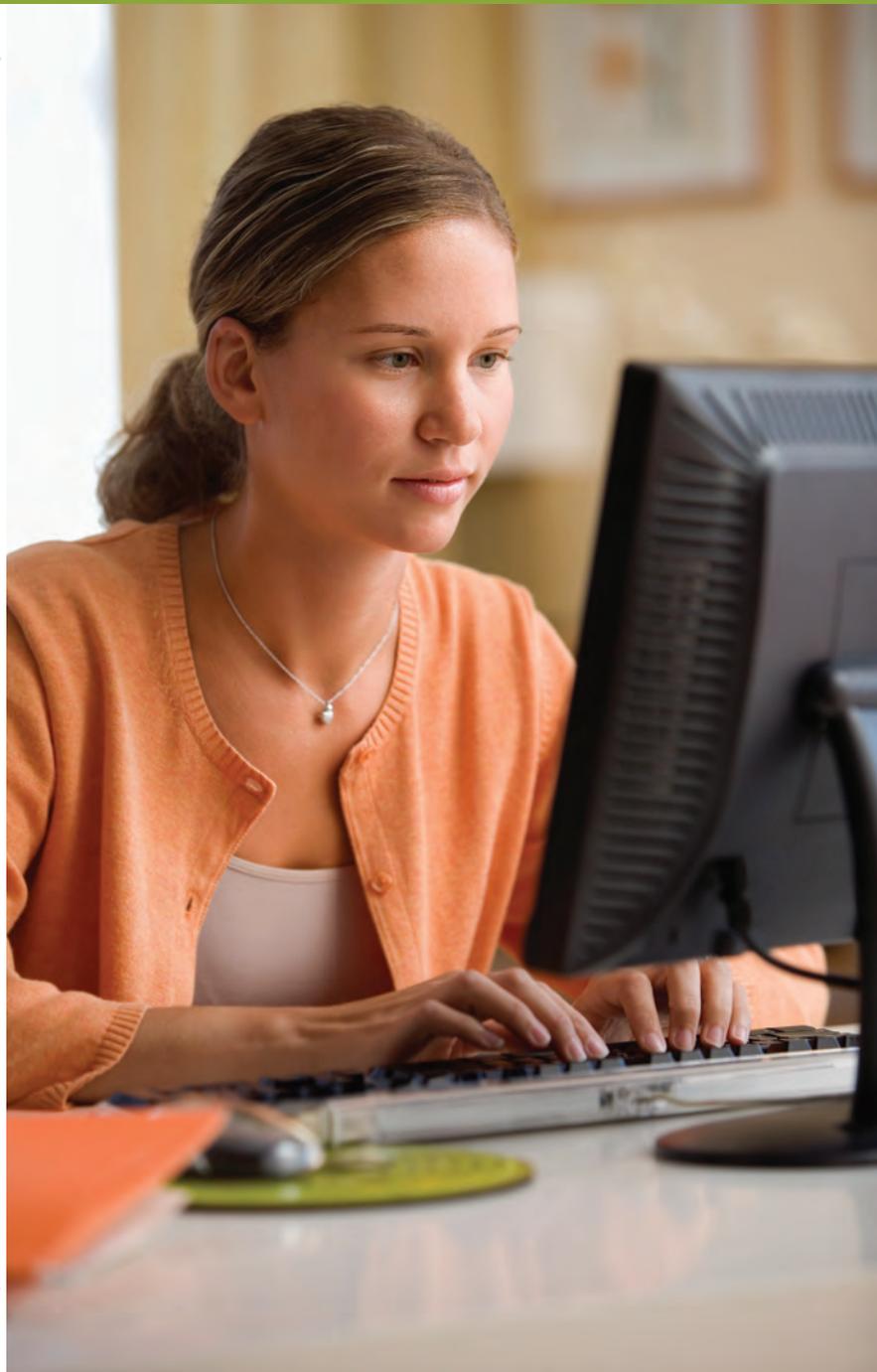
Create Your PLN:

Have you been thinking about expanding your professional knowledge through a personal learning network? Wait no longer.

Will Richardson

In this connected, networked world in which we educate, it's crucial that we experience firsthand the opportunities and challenges of having the sum of human knowledge and billions of potential teachers at our fingertips. Personal learning networks (PLNs) allow us to do just that—to fully understand that professional development is no longer an event but an ongoing process and that there are brilliant, inspired educators willing to help us improve our craft and engage in big ideas whenever and wherever we're ready.

The good news is that PLNs aren't hard to build. Here are a few tips to get you started.



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6 Easy Steps

1 Pick Your Passion

PLNs are about *learning*, not necessarily about teaching. You can use a PLN to learn about whatever you have a passion to learn. Although becoming a better educator may be your goal, don't be afraid to experiment with your other passions, like fly fishing, the TV show *The Voice*, or whatever controversial social or political issue is on your mind.

Or, if you want to stick to education, maybe your passion is keeping up on the latest tech tools, building a 1:1 program, or discussing school leadership. The idea is to connect with other people who share that passion, share your own ideas or experiences, and learn more together. So start with whatever topic you want to learn about most.

2 Get a Twitter Account

If you're not familiar with Twitter, you might be surprised at this suggestion. In many ways, Twitter is a sea of stupidity and irrelevance. But if you know where to look, Twitter can also be an ocean of deep learning. A PLN is all about finding people to connect with, and that's easiest done these days on Twitter.

A first step is doing a basic Twitter search for your passion to see who's writing about it. If you want the ins and outs of getting an account and figuring out the fundamentals of finding, connecting, and sharing with others on

Twitter, I suggest the *Twitter Handbook for Teachers* created by Powerful Learning Practice.

3 Do a Blog Search

Another way you can find people who write about your passion is to do a Google blog search, where you can find blogs that address your topic. Spend some time tweaking your search to narrow it down as much as you can and then click through the results. For instance, you might move from "education" to "education leadership" to "education leadership, principals." Folks like Pam Moran, Chris Lehmann, Patrick Larkin, and many others come up in searches like that one.

Either bookmark their blogs for future access, or check out a tool like Feedly that allows you to subscribe to the RSS feed and get automatic updates from those sites. And if you find some relevant bloggers who add to your thinking and learning, check to see whether they have Twitter accounts and follow them there as well.

4 Be a Lurker . . . For a While

Once you've found some people who look interesting, spend some time just reading their tweets and posts until you get comfortable with their general style and the topics that they cover. Look for ways they engage their audiences, how they present

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themselves in these public spaces, and the interactions that ensue. Then, reach out and connect, either by commenting on their blogs or by sending them a tweet.

5 Share Good Stuff

At some point, being in a PLN means participating. And if you want to grow your connections, the best advice is simply to share quality links or ideas that others in your network will benefit from.

I try to find and share links to awesome articles, presentations, or videos on how literacy is changing, or what the future of work looks like for our kids, or a new tool that looks especially promising. That can come in the form of a 140-character tweet or a lengthier blog post. (If you want to see a running list of everything I share on Twitter, check out my Delicious page).

6 Make It a Habit

PLNs require nurturing and attention, and the easiest way to watch your network grow is to dedicate some time to it each day. Even 15 minutes of reading and sharing daily can make a huge difference over time. Remember, you don't have to read everything that your PLN shares, but if you want to open up more possibilities for your own learning and connection, it's important to interact as regularly as you can. [EL](#)

Will Richardson is a parent, educator, speaker, and author, most recently of *Why School? How Education Must Change When Learning and Information Are Everywhere* (TED Conferences, 2012). He blogs at <http://willrichardson.com>.

Dave's Faves: Blogs of Note

The ASCD reference librarian gives you his personal recommendations for blogs that you might want to add to your personal learning network.

So many blogs, so little time! Busy educators can't read it all, but the following blogs are worth a spot on your regular reading list.

Common Core Connection

Education Week hosts a large number of excellent reported blogs, all accessible without a subscription. One stands out as essential. As most U.S. states work to implement the Common Core State Standards, *Curriculum Matters* has distinguished itself as a hub for the latest developments, from new research to ground-level news.

For a practitioner perspective, try the blog of Gerald W. Aungst, who writes regularly on professional development and the Common Core standards. His ongoing series, *Common Core Toolkits for Principals*, is packed with tips and resources for school leaders.

Ed Tech Talk

If you're looking for a wide-angle view of education technology and all the venture capital, movers, shakers, and startups that ed tech entails these days, *Hack Education* is a must-read. Its regular roundups of the scene are as skeptical and sardonic as they are thorough.

For a more practitioner-focused technology integration read, try *A Principal's Reflections* from Eric Sheneringer. It's a consistently engaging and useful blog, particularly on how principals can lead professional development in their schools and foster positive use of technology.

Let's Talk About Practice

Edutopia hosts a regular rotation of compelling writers, many of whom are practicing educators. They write on a wide range of topics, such as educational gaming, blended learning, and assessment. Similarly, the Center for Teaching Quality's blogs are a diverse mix of complementary voices, from Bill Ferriter to Barnett Berry.

And of course, ASCD EDge, in addition to being a social network, is home to a growing number of blogging educators—of which you could become one!

Finding More

Checking the blogrolls of your favorite bloggers is a time-tested way to expand your reading horizons. But when that well seems to be running dry, try perusing the Edublog Awards, an annual recognition program that celebrates the best in the blogosphere. It's particularly useful for finding well-regarded blogs in different categories, like those run by principals or technology coordinators.

—David Snyder

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