

INNOVATIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Expanding Your Professional Learning Network

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In the October 2009 edition of *School Library Journal*, authors Joyce Valenza and Doug Johnson stated, “Librarians who don’t have PLNs, don’t attend conferences, don’t read cutting-edge professional literature—both from the library and the education worlds—are dragging our profession down. And good people are going with them.” Harsh words? Perhaps. True? Very

likely! PLNs—or professional learning networks—are now even more vital to maintaining the integrity of our profession than they were several years ago. To assume the role of technology leaders and information literacy specialists in our schools, we need access to the most current information. And, we do this by helping each other.

What are Professional Learning Networks (PLNs)?

There are many definitions, but PLNs involve sharing work-related ideas with a network of colleagues via various digital communications (and even face-to-face) for the betterment of one’s professional practice.

FIVE REASONS WHY SCHOOL LIBRARIANS NEED ROBUST PLNs

1

Access to the thinking of colleagues: PLNs that include digital communications allow us to broaden our professional perspective to gain viewpoints from leaders in the fields of librarianship, education, and technology. In response to a Google doc survey in August 2011, Phil Goerner, the librarian at Silver Creek High School in Longmont, Colorado shared, "I really feel that all teacher-librarians need some type of PLN. Many of us are so isolated in our buildings it helps us keep up and is exciting to learn!"



2

Access to timely information: PLNs give us information, as it is happening, to support our information, literature, and technology leadership growth.



3

The ability to post questions and get responses: If two heads are better than one, hundreds of minds working together provide an unprecedented ability to help us support our students' learning needs.

Collaboration with colleagues:

Active PLNs help us to work more effectively with our peers and also help us to bring project-based learning activities to our students, enabling them to work with classes around the world. The "Two Libraries, One Voice" blog <<http://twolibrariesonevoice.blogspot.com>>, built by school librarians John Schumacher (AKA "John Schu") in Illinois and Shannon Miller in Iowa, provides many examples of what is possible when PLN colleagues use various technologies to connect their students to others around literature and research activities.



4

Communicate about events: We can use PLN tools to share news about upcoming virtual events. For example, colleagues in the Illinois School Library Media Association Facebook group use the group's event feature to inform members about upcoming webinars. Also, many conferences now use Twitter hashtags to allow people to communicate on a back-channel about the event, whether at the conference or not. In response to an August 2011 online survey, Erin Wyatt, the school librarian at Highland Middle School in Libertyville, Illinois shared, "Since the days I can go to conferences from school are limited, I find it really valuable to follow conference sessions (via a hashtag)."

5



PLN Game Changers

A robust PLN employs different technologies to network around different content types. Heavy-hitters include Twitter for micro-blogging (follow the #tlchat hashtag); Google Reader for aggregating blog feeds; FourSquare for geolocation to follow your colleagues at conference or other sites; professional networking sites, including FaceBook (join professional groups), Google+, and Edmodo (password-protected); and specialty sites, such as Diigo (bookmark sharing), Goodreads, Shelfari, and LibraryThing (book info sharing); or SlideShare (presentations) and Scribd (documents).



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Works Cited:

Valenza, Joyce Kasman, and Doug Johnson. 2009. "Things That Keep Us Up at Night." *School Library Journal* 10, no.1. <www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6699357.html> (accessed September 21, 2011).

MANAGEMENT TIPS

HERE IS SOME ADVICE FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN A PLN

Manage your PLN actively.

Regularly add to your network new people who inspire you, and don't hesitate to delete those whose work does not resonate with yours.

Don't try to read everything.

It is far better to commit to reading for five to ten minutes daily and to pick up several great ideas you can use with your students than to avoid reading at all because you don't have time to read everything.

Don't lurk; give back to others.

PLNs function best when everyone contributes his or her wisdom. Take time to post your own great ideas.

Flesh out your profile.

People will be much more likely to follow you, friend you, and communicate with you if they know who you are professionally.

Separate your private and personal lives.

While a little "bleed-over" is fine, you'll want to decide who sees what. Facebook and Google+ allow you to post to specified groups of contacts.

Post comments that are professional.

Your comments should reflect appropriately on your school.

Use mobile devices.

Using mobile devices will provide greater access.

Use aggregators to post to and monitor multiple accounts.

TweetDeck, HootSuite, and Seismic are just a few popular aggregators. The SGPlus browser extension for Chrome allows you to post to Google+ and other outlets simultaneously.

Review your district policy in friending students.

If you create a presence for your school library in Facebook or Twitter, you may decide to make it one-way to share information about your program.

WITH AN ACTIVE PLN, YOU ARE NEVER ALONE. GET STARTED TODAY.