

Cultivate Your Personal Learning Network - Grow Your Knowledge Building Community – Prepare for an Abundant Fall Harvest

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What is a Personal Learning Network?

Will Richardson defines personal learning networks (PLN) as “the collection 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.” (www.nercomp.org/data/media/PLNTraining_OutlineWIT.pdf) He explains, “Personal Learning Networks extend your learning through increased reflection, while enabling you to learn as part of a global community. That’s not to say that face-to-face learning isn’t important or valuable. It is. But so is the learning we can now do on the Web. And it’s the melding of the two that will shape our schools in the 21st century.” (<http://weblogg-ed.com/tag/pln/>)

School librarians are the driving force behind learning networks within the school culture. Today, school librarians have a wealth of tools available to assist faculty and students in developing effective management of information systems including PLN’s. Tools to build personal learning networks include:

- Face-to-face connections in building, districts, regions and at conferences.
- Listserv email networks including OELMA, INFOhio, ITC’s, and LMNet.
- Blogs from professionals like the *Unquiet Librarian* and *School Library Journal* accessed through RSS feeds in an aggregator like Google Reader.
- RSS feeds from INFOhio’s EBSCOhost professional journals such as *School Library Journal*, *Educational Leadership*, and *School Library Media Activities Monthly* accessed in an aggregator like Google Reader.
- Daily Twitter Tweets from individuals and organizations such as INFOhio, Stephen Abrams, Stephen Anderson, Joyce Valenza, and Vickie Davis (coolcatteacher), Buffy Hamilton (the Unquiet Librarian), and Gwyneth Jones (the Daring Librarian).
- Social networking sources such as the INFOhio Knowledge Building Community, ISTE Learning, edWeb, Facebook, Ning and Linked-in.

The challenge is managing these connections and growing the network of contacts so that librarians and teachers have all of these dynamic, professional information sources and the best support system. The goal is for faculty to attract information through the advances in technology and utilize the opportunities to thrive and grow professionally in their 21st century classroom or library. INFOhio, realizing the need for a virtual collaboration space, accessible 24/7 in districts as well as at home, developed the **Knowledge Building Community** for networking, sharing, and growth.

What is a Knowledge Building Community?

David Loertscher, Ross Todd, and other experts with the Ontario School Library Association in [Together for Learning, School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons](#), defines a Learning Commons as, "a vibrant, whole-school approach, presenting exciting opportunities for collaboration among teachers, teacher-librarians and students. Within a Learning Commons, new relationships are formed between learners, new technologies are realized and utilized, and both students and educators prepare for the future as they learn new ways to learn." (www.accessola.com/data/6/rec_docs/677_OLATogetherforLearning.pdf) Building on the extensive Learning Commons work of David Loertscher, INFOhio set out to create a virtual environment that facilitates the creation, use, exchange and sharing of knowledge beyond the district level, so that librarians and teachers across Ohio can do their jobs better, improve their skills, and lead students to successful learning. This is INFOhio's Knowledge Building Community or KBC.

INFOhio's Learning Commons and KBC

INFOhio's Learning Commons (LC) and Knowledge Building Community (KBC) provide a place for Ohio school librarians and teachers to gain content and apply what they know and learn collaboratively. The LC is a professional development content portal with information about 21st Century Learning Skills and self-directed learning modules, including *21 Essential Things for 21st Century Success*. The KBC is a social networking environment that provides a way to connect with other Ohio educators. The connections can be individual conversations or collaborative conversations through groups. There are already more than 2,400 registered LC participants.

The screenshot displays the 21st Century Learning Commons website. At the top, the title "21ST CENTURY LEARNING COMMONS" is visible, along with a "NEW" button. Below the title is a navigation bar with links for Home, 21 Essential Things, Learning Skills, Videos, Glossary, Forums, Community, and Logout. The main content area features a "Main Menu" on the left with options like Home, Get Started / Register, 21 Essential Things, Learning Paths, Credit/CEU, Learning Skills, Community, Glossary, Videos, Forum, and Contact Support. The central banner reads "YOU'RE CONNECTED! collaborate communicate connect share" and promotes "21 Things for 21st Century Success" and "21st Century Learning Skills". To the right, there is a "Members" section showing a grid of user avatars and a "Search" bar with a "Try our Advanced Search" option. Below the search bar, there is a "Latest Groups" section listing various groups such as "CMSD Book People", "Woooster City Schools Online Learning Environment", and "CERN Librarians".

Teachers, librarians and, in some cases school districts, use the LC to hone their understanding of 21st Century Learning and help integrate these skills into k-12 classrooms. The *21 Essential Things for 21st Century Success* provides 21 modules on new tools and ways to use the INFOhio Resources for project-based learning. The *Essential Things* introduce ideas for integrating Web 2.0 tools into classroom projects and promote student creation of new knowledge using the tools. The *Things* also encourage use of INFOhio resources and other classroom- based knowledge. In addition, the INFOhio Learning Commons includes a series of forums that encourage educators to share how they have used these tools in their classroom. These forums have grown to include more than 1600 topics and 2500 messages.

As the LC grew, it became evident that Ohio educators would benefit from a more robust collaborative knowledge-building environment. Through work with the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, the Knowledge Building Community was developed.

In the KBC, many school districts have begun group conversations. For instance, Cleveland Metropolitan School District high school librarians formed a group promoting conversation about effective use of databases and virtual research materials. And 49 school librarians from across Ohio are having an e-book/e-textbook conversation, discussing the ways e-books are being used in their schools and seeking advice about purchasing e-books and e-audio books rather than traditional print textbooks.

The screenshot displays the 'INFOhio eBook Group' page within the Knowledge Building Community. The interface is divided into several sections:

- Group Information:** Shows the group name 'eBOOK Study Group', created on Sunday, 06 February 2011, by user 'gdk@kbc.org'. It lists the most recent post from 2011-02-28 16:23:02.
- Description:** A text block explaining the group's purpose: 'Group members will share their knowledge about how eBooks and eTextbooks can be used effectively in school libraries. This group will also study the mobile devices that can be used to read eBooks.'
- Members:** A grid of 49 member profile pictures.
- Discussions:** A list of discussion topics with their respective authors and reply counts. Examples include 'eTextbooks work but interesting article', 'Carnegie News Article: "Which e-reader is best for you?"', and 'E-readers for 5th grade students and interested adults'.
- File Sharing:** A section for sharing files, listing items like 'E-reader_lib.doc' (42 KB), 'Links to articles on eReaders' (19.47 KB), 'ODE Core Free ebook repository 4.doc' (15.41 KB), and 'eReaders PowerPoint.ppt' (7970 KB).

The KBC provides a virtual environment for teachers and librarians to work together across the district and across the state, to discuss solutions and changes in education and to meet the needs of

local communities while reducing costs. The ITC's and EdTech agencies across Ohio have joined the conversation and are encouraging their constituents to join as well.

Education is changing. No longer are teachers delivering one-size-fits-all lessons. Today's teachers work with individual students as learning coaches. The INFOhio Learning Commons and Knowledge Building Community provide teachers, librarians and educators with the tools necessary to succeed in a learning coach environment.

Checklist for developing your own Personal Learning Network

1. Join the INFOhio Learning Commons.
2. Participate in the LC forums.
3. Join the INFOhio KBC, participate in several interest groups.
4. Form your own group based on an interest or challenge.
5. Join Twitter and follow INFOhio and education leaders.
6. Tweet the valuable resources you discover and successes you are having.
7. Ask questions and share your expertise on teaching and learning in the KBC.

Checklist for leading your faculty to cultivate a knowledge building community (Summer virtual PD opportunities – free)

1. Work with your LPDC to promote INFOhio's *21 Things for 21st Century Success* as a district learning opportunity and accept the *My Learning Path* documents for contact hour credits.
2. Form a group to work through the *21 Essential Things* together this summer.
3. Form a group in the KBC for your school study group and initiate some discussion.
4. Join one of the KBC idea exchange groups and encourage your staff to join groups as well.
5. Create a KBC idea exchange group focused on a topic of concern to you or your school.
6. Organize a group, view and discuss the archived INFOhio Webinars for the 2010-11 school year together for contact hour credits. www.infohio.org/Educator/Webinars2010-011.html
7. Create Twitter accounts together and work together to choose education leaders to follow. Add INFOhio to your list.
8. Explore other parts of the Learning Commons to find out more about the Learning Skills and Videos that are available to supplement your learning.
9. Plan a fall networking and sharing conversation among your faculty members on what they learned this summer and expected classroom changes for the 2012 school year.

Personal Learning Networks in Action

Librarians around the state are organizing groups of teachers to work through the *21 Things* together for professional development. Travis Bogart, the District Librarian at Bright Local Schools in Highland County, has organized such a group which meets after school to learn new things together. The goal, he says, is to create a group of Ambassadors for 21st Century Skills in the district who can inspire other teachers to implement the skills as well. The Ambassadors will present some of what they have learned and are implementing at a back-to-school in-service for the entire staff in the fall.

This is what one of the Bright teachers posted in the *Thing 10 Forum*, "I am excited to learn that there are search engines out there that are based on standards and curriculum and can display info in a variety of ways for many learners. I will be honest, I don't really have students do a lot of research in 4th grade math. I am going to try to use the Wolfram Alpha search engine with my students. I like how it can create tables and graphs to show similarities and differences. This is a Marzano strategy our school district has been trying to incorporate more into all classrooms. I did not know that Google had graphical display choices. I really like the Google Square beta. I think this makes info easier to see for students. I am also excited to learn about the Digital Video Collection offered through INFOhio."

"I use Twitter almost daily first thing in the morning. I call it my 'hour of power.' I can't even begin to elaborate on how I have changed, learned and grown from the PLN I have on Twitter."

Resources

INFOhio Learning Commons: <http://learningcommons.infohio.org>

Google Reader: <http://www.google.com/reader>

Blogs mentioned in article:

- The Unquiet Librarian: <http://theunquietlibrarian.wordpress.com>
- School Library Journal blogs: <http://blog.schoollibraryjournal.com/allblog.php>

Twitter links:

- INFOhio on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/infohio>
 - Stephen Abrams: <https://twitter.com/sabram>
 - Stephen Anderson: <https://www.twitter.com/web20classroom>
 - Joyce Valenza: <https://twitter.com/joycevalenza>
 - Vicki Davis: twitter.com/coolcatteacher
 - Buffy Hamilton: <https://twitter.com/buffyjhamilton>
 - Gwyneth Jones: <http://twitter.com/gwynethjones>
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Social Network Links:

- INFOhio Knowledge Building Community: <http://learningcommons.infohio.org> (available after registering and signing in)
- ISTE Learning Community: <http://istelearning.org>
- edWeb: <http://www.edweb.net>
- Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com>
- Ning: <http://www.ning.com>
- LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com>

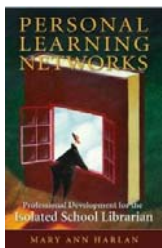


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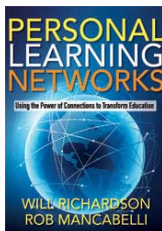


Melissa Higgs-Horwell was a former school librarian at Pickaway-Ross Career Center in Chillicothe for 24 years and also served as Technology Coordinator for the last 5 of those years. She recently retired with 35 years in education after serving 8 years as Distance Learning Coordinator at the SCOCA ITC. She is the 2008 OELMA Award of Merit winner and is currently working as a consultant for INFOhio.

Books about Personal Learning Networks



Personal Learning Networks: Professional Development for the Isolated School Librarian by Mary Ann Harlan. Libraries Unlimited; (March 20, 2009). Harlan, a school librarian, explains how to build a personal learning network for librarians who want to feel connected to the educational world and enhance their professional growth. She details aspects of Web 2.0 for those new to the environment; describes the use of RSS feeds, wikis, blogs, social bookmarking, social networking, podcasting, vodcasting, short message blogging through Twitter, book networks, and Second Life and provides background on the importance of professional development, as well as traditional tools like conferences, organizations, online courses, and listservs.



Personal Learning Networks: Using the Power of Connections to Transform Education by Will Richardson & Rob Mancabelli. (Not yet released.) Authors Will Richardson and Rob Mancabelli provide the perspectives and the processes needed to use personal learning networks to become educated, empowered and ready for the global economy—"a bottom-up progression that can fundamentally change the way schools operate: - Understanding the power of these networks - Becoming a networked individual - Implementing a networked classroom - Becoming a networked school Using step-by-step advice and real-world stories, this book aims to narrow the technological divide, put educators on the same footing as students, and provide a recipe for incorporating these tools into every class-