Developing and Expanding a Personal Learning Network

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As education continues to evolve in response to technological advancements and increasing professional demands, educators must engage in ongoing learning that extends beyond traditional professional development models. One approach that supports continuous, personalized professional growth is the development of a personal learning network (PLN). A PLN consists of the people, resources, and digital tools an individual intentionally connects with to support learning and professional development. Research suggests that PLNs foster agency, connectedness, and access to diverse perspectives by bridging formal and informal learning environments (Kennedy, 2018; Oddone et al., 2019).

The purpose of this paper is to describe my current personal learning network, reflect on its limitations, and outline a plan for expanding my PLN through intentional participation in broader professional communities. Additionally, this paper discusses the benefits of belonging to a PLN as supported by current research.

Current Personal Learning Network

At present, my personal learning network is limited in scope and primarily confined to tools used within my immediate professional environment. While I engage with several widely available digital platforms (Table 1), my participation is largely passive and locally focused. This reflects an early stage of PLN development characterized by limited interaction and a reliance on familiar, institutionally bounded tools.

Although these platforms support daily professional tasks, they do not function as a true PLN. Engagement is restricted to my school context, limiting exposure to broader perspectives and innovative practices. According to Oddone et al. (2019), PLNs that remain locally bounded often provide immediate support but lack the diversity and reach needed for sustained

professional growth. Similarly, Kennedy (2018) notes that early PLN engagement often prioritizes safety and control, which can limit opportunities for deeper connectedness and learning.

Table 1

Current Personal Learning Network

Network Name	Site/URL	Description and Purpose	Participation Style	Estimated Time per Month
Facebook	www.facebook.com	General social networking platform	Passive use only; no professional posting or interaction; avoid connecting with colleagues	< 1 hour
YouTube	www.youtube.com	Video hosting platform for instructional and music-related content	Primarily content consumption; limited school-related posting; not used for networking due to student access	3–4 hours
Google Classroom (School-Based)	classroom.google.com	Learning management and communication tool within my school	Share resources and communicate with colleagues within my building	8–10 hours

Planning for PLN Expansion

To move beyond a locally focused and passive network, I plan to intentionally expand my PLN by joining professional organizations and digital platforms that support collaboration, knowledge sharing, and ongoing professional learning. This expansion aligns with research emphasizing the value of weak ties (connections beyond one's immediate environment), which can introduce new ideas, perspectives, and opportunities (Haas et al., 2020).

Table 2

Planned PNL Expansion

Network Name	URL	Purpose and Learning Goals	Planned Participation
American String Teachers Association (ASTA)	www.astastrings.org	Access research, best practices, webinars, and national conferences specific to string education	Read journals and newsletters; attend webinars and conferences; apply strategies to instruction
LinkedIn	www.linkedin.com	Build a professional digital identity and connect with educators and instructional designers	Follow organizations; engage with shared resources; gradually contribute professional content
X (formerly Twitter)	www.x.com	Participate in informal professional learning communities and real-time discussions	Follow music educators and organizations; engage with hashtags; observe and later contribute to discussions

The primary goal of expanding my PLN is to engage in professional learning that extends beyond my building and district. By connecting with national organizations and broader professional communities, I aim to gain access to current research, innovative instructional practices, and diverse perspectives within music education and instructional design. Haas et al. (2020) emphasize that PLNs allow educators to connect anytime and anywhere, supporting individualized learning and career satisfaction. Additionally, Oddone et al. (2019) describe how intentional participation in PLNs enables educators to move from basic information gathering toward deeper engagement and contribution.

Benefits of Belonging to a Personal Learning Network

One significant benefit of belonging to a PLN is increased professional agency. PLNs allow educators to take ownership of their learning by selecting resources, connections, and topics aligned with personal interests and professional goals. Kennedy (2018) describes connectedness within PLNs as fostering motivation and agency, enabling educators to pursue meaningful learning beyond formal requirements.

Another benefit of PLNs is access to diverse perspectives. Engaging with professionals from different contexts exposes educators to alternative approaches, ideas, and problem-solving strategies. Oddone et al. (2019) note that PLNs reduce professional isolation by supporting interest-driven, socially connected learning. These diverse perspectives can inspire reflection and innovation that may not emerge within a single school environment.

PLNs also serve as a bridge between formal and informal learning. Traditional professional development is often limited to isolated events with minimal follow-up. In contrast, PLNs support continuous learning that is embedded in practice and responsive to immediate needs. Haas et al. (2020) emphasize that connected educators benefit from ongoing

collaboration, content sharing, and relationship building, which contribute to both professional growth and career satisfaction.

Conclusion

Currently, my personal learning network is limited in scope and largely confined to local, school-based tools. While these platforms support daily professional tasks, they do not provide the breadth of connection or learning opportunities associated with a fully developed PLN. By intentionally expanding my network to include professional organizations and broader digital communities, I aim to engage in more meaningful, self-directed professional learning. Research supports the value of PLNs in fostering agency, connectedness, and access to diverse perspectives. As my PLN expands, I anticipate increased professional growth, collaboration, and a stronger sense of connection within the broader educational community.

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