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ED 620 – Module #2

**1. *Describe what a Personal Learning Network means to you.***

To me, a Personal Learning Network (PLN) is a valuable resource for educators, young and old. It is a resource that keeps building and growing as time goes on. Through the impact of technology, the world of education is constantly changing and so should our collection of resources.

Defined, a PLN “consist[s] of the people a learner interacts with and derives knowledge from in a Personal Learning Environment. An important part of this concept is the theory of connectivism…Learners create connections and develop a network that contributes to their professional development and knowledge.” ([Wikipedia – Personal Learning Networks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_Learning_Networks))

Lengthy definition aside, a Personal Learning Network is just that: a network of resources that can be used for learning that is personal to the needs and content of the individual.

**2. *Describe what you see as the value, or lack thereof, of a PLN.***

As with any network, the value of all its parts lies within the overall structure and application. A Personal Learning Network that is poorly constructed and hardly ever utilized has little to no value to an educator. However, on the other hand, a PLN that is very well organized and used to its full potential is one of the most valuable resources for the classroom.

I feel as though Personal Learning Networks are very useful resources. Having a collection of knowledgeable educators, academic websites, innovative software, effective classroom materials, etc. all at your disposal whenever you log onto a computer is amazing. The most amazing part of a PLN is the fact that it will continue to grow and evolve over time just like technology grows and evolves.

**3. *Are you or were you ever part of any type of learning network prior to this class?***

Before ED620, I had never heard of the term “Personal Learning Network.” However, I did/do use a lot of the tools and resources that make up my own PLN before this course started.

One of the biggest features of my PLN that I created long before this class is my blog (<http://njpearce-jchc.blogspot.com>) documenting the work that I do as a graduate assistant at the [Jefferson County History Center](http://www.jchconline.org). Through my posts, I share my ideas and work that I have done while incorporating technology into the small-town organization. In addition to my blogging, I also have a [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com) account ([@n\_pearce](http://www.twitter.com/n_pearce)) where I follow people that are tech savvy and share great resources. Also, I have used social bookmarking long before ED620. I have used [Delicious](http://www.delicious.com) to keep track of [my online resources](http://www.delicious.com/njpearce) for a project I completed at the History Center, and I personally browse [StumbleUpon](http://www.stumbleupon.com) for leisure whenever I get bored and am on my computer.

**4. *What tools do you think would be helpful for you to create and maintain a PLN?***

Before ED620, my fragments of a PLN were sort of just scattered out there in the world with no real connections. A very valuable tool for any PLN that I was made more aware of because of this course is an [RSS feed reader](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rss). For me, this means [Google Reader](http://reader.google.com). Through the use of this tool, I can keep track of all the valuable websites, blogs, etc. that I find out on the web and be notified whenever new information becomes available from these resources. It’s almost as if my PLN takes care of itself because of the RSS feeds!

I did run across some trouble incorporating the valuable resources on Twitter into my reader. But, with a little research on Google, I did find a way to discover the RSS associated with any Twitter account. [This website](http://sociable.co/2011/04/30/twitter-hasnt-killed-rss-just-yet-heres-how-to-find-your-twitter-feed-rss-url/) explains two ways to discover the RSS address of a Twitter user so that you can incorporate it into your personal RSS reader hub of information and resources.

**5. *Can you anticipate yourself maintaining a PLN after this class is over?***

I will definitely maintain my PLN after this class is over. In fact, I will probably have a little more free time to grow and streamline all of my resources. I plan on searching out some educational blogs that relate to my work and also plan on building up the pieces of my PLN that I already have started (Twitter, Delicious, etc.).

Also, I will continue to blog about my experience at the Jefferson County History Center. Not only has this been a great way to share my work, it has also helped me keep track of my progress and growth in the world of educational technology. Going back through the posts, I definitely see growth, and I hope this trend will continue as I become more knowledgeable in the field of educational technology as I complete my graduate program.

**6. *List any websites and resources you’ve discovered while exploring.***

In addition to the resources that I’ve linked above, here are some really great things that I have found over the past week that could benefit anyone in ED620:

* [opensourcemac.org](http://www.opensourcemac.org) – Just like the name says, this website is dedicated to various open source software for the Mac OS X user.
* [Adobe Kuler](http://kuler.adobe.com) – This is a really cool web resource if you are involved in any kind of design (basic image editing, website design, etc.). It is an interactive color palate tool that allows you to view user submitted palates, search for ones on your own, or create palates for others.
* [thriftmac.com](http://www.thriftmac.com) – Another great resource for free Mac tools.
* [THE Journal](http://thejournal.com/Home.aspx) – Technological Horizons in Education (THE) Journal is a really good place for any educator to find out information about the world of educational technology. I personally like their email newsletter.
* [MailChimp](http://www.mailchimp.com) – This one wasn’t discovered this week, but it is a valuable resource that could have great classroom application. It is an email client that allows you to easily create very visually pleasing HTML emails to send out to manageable lists. This would be great for the classroom, either to keep parents informed about the happenings of class or as a way to connect with students on another level.