Building Your Personal Learning Network, Part 2

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In the March 2009 issue of *SchoolArts*, I discussed the popularity of personal learning networks (PLN) and presented two tips to get you started on building your own PLN—join the Twitter community and set up a social bookmarking account. In this edition of ArtEd Online, I offer three additional tips and several resources for more information and assistance.

Tip 3: Subscribe to Blogs That Interest You

Blogs have become a primary source of news, information, and opinion. In 2007, **Technorati.com** reported tracking more than 70 million blogs, with about 120,000 new blogs being created worldwide each day. Blogs cover virtually every topic imaginable including art, design, and art education. Although the majority of blogs are written and maintained by individuals, there are also group blogs in which multiple authors contribute.

A good way to start building your PLN is to regularly read blogs by other art educators to find out what they're doing in their classrooms and what resources they find helpful. Some of the art teacher blogs I follow are the Carrot Revolution (**carrotrevolution.blogspot.com**), the Teaching Palette (**theteachingpalette.com**), and the Digital Arts Technology Academy (**digitalartstechacademy.blogspot.com**). You can find other blogs to read on Google Blog Search (**blogsearch.google.com**) and **Technorati.com**. Another good place to look is Alltop, which lists the top fifty art blogs (**art.alltop.com**) and more than 150 of the top education blogs (**education.alltop.com**). Lastly, check out the blogrolls listed in the sidebar of your favorite bloggers to see what they read.

Once you find several blogs that you'd like to follow, you can subscribe to them using their RSS feeds. RSS stands for "read simple syndication" and is a convenient way for you to keep up with the news and information that's important to you. Using an RSS feed reader like Google Reader (**www.google.com/reader**) or Bloglines (**www.bloglines.com**) will aggregate the latest content from your favorite blogs and deliver it directly to you in an easy to read format. To learn more, watch the Common Craft video "RSS in Plain English" (**www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english**) and see Google Reader for Beginners (**tinyurl.com/775qv4**).

Tip 4: Create a Personal Learning Portal or Start-up Page

If you regularly visit the same websites or blogs to check for new content, there are two alternatives that can save you time. One is to use an RSS feed reader or aggregator as described in tip three. The other approach is to create a personal learning portal (PLP), or start-up page, that brings together links and RSS feeds to various sites, blogs, and Web-based tools you visit and use on a regular basis, and makes them available through your Web browser. Three popular Web-based tools that allow you to create a PLP are iGoogle (**www.google.com/ig**), Netvibes (**www.netvibes.com**), and Pageflakes (**www.pageflakes.com**). Each of these tools is easy to use and offers templates to get you up and running in minutes.

Tip 5: Contribute Your Own Thoughts and Content on Your Network

What you gain from your personal learning network will be in direct proportion to what you put into it; the more you contribute, the more you'll get back. This is true of any group or organization you might join, and it applies equally as well to a PLN. By sharing links through a social bookmarking site, posting messages and replies on Twitter, and commenting on blog entries by other art educators, you'll find that your personal learning network will grow and become a valuable resource that you'll frequently turn to for answers and support. ✎

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