

# TEACHING TODAY'S LEARNERS #18

## Tips for Helping Students Create a Personal Learning Network

### What is a Personal Learning Network?

A Personal Learning Network is comprised of the people you learn from whether face-to-face or online, around the globe. These people challenge us and make us think. They share ideas with us, collaborate with us, and support our endeavors. They also argue with us, question us, and push us to clarify our ideas. Wherever they are, these are the people who represent our Personal Learning Network.

### What's in it for my students?

As we let go of the “sage of the stage” mentality to relinquish control and allow learners to take more responsibility for their own learning, we move to a “guide on the side” approach. Because the teacher is no longer the sole expert in the room, this means students need to develop a Personal Learning Network, or those people that will support, challenge, argue, and ultimately support them. Learners need the skills and opportunities to learn from and with a wider network of people.

### How do we help our students develop their own Personal Learning Network?

Kids are pretty great at developing networks themselves, what we can do though, is teach them *how* to learn with others. Here are 8 ways to support students in developing a Personal Learning Network:

#### 1) Rethink physical space

Simply, one could arrange tables or desks in groups to provide opportunities for students to engage more fully with their in-class Personal Learning Network. Encourage conversation among those groups. Encourage cooperation and collaboration. Set tasks that allow students to construct meaning together with their PLN.

#### 2) Let learners talk

Whoever is doing the talking is doing the learning! Avoid doing all the talking, and don't always be the filter. Allow learners to respond directly to each other and problem solve. Even if you do have a direct instruction day, use routines such as Think-Pair-Share.

#### 3) Focus on communication

Whoever is in their Personal Learning Network, students need to know how to communicate. Listening is just as essential as speaking. Teach students that it isn't always about them. 😊 Model consideration and mutual respect within a PLN.





**4) Be a part of their Personal Learning Network**

Help students to focus on the process as much (or more) than the product. Model what strong learning looks like, sounds like, and feels like. Share your own learning/thinking process with students and learn along with them. Show students that you don't know all the answers and then make visible your problem solving process. There is nothing better than exploring and investigating with your learners!

**5) Encourage family conversation**

Invite parents/guardians to share in the learning – in person or by commenting on class blogs, student projects, etc. Create tasks that involve parents, grandparents, or siblings. Try sending students with wonderings that haven't been addressed in class to dive into at home!

**6) Surpass classroom walls**

Create global connections. Collaborate with kids in other cities, states, and countries. Set up a Voicethread so kids can communicate with others all over the world. Through Skype, find classes who are learning about similar topics to share ideas or locate learners examining similar issues to debate.

**7) Learn from experts**

Invite speakers and experts in from the community to share their expertise and make connections with the students. Or bring in people from anywhere in the world via Skype (think virtual field trip). Encourage students to pursue their interests by finding people they can learn from outside of the school walls.

**8) Learn through blogging**

Start a class blog! This helps students write for an authentic audience and for authentic purposes. Ask other classes to join and get students to read and comment on other class blogs. Developing these conversations and relationships are powerful for our students.

**What's in it for me?**

Great educators never stop learning. Our own Personal Learning Network can help us discover and share new ways to collaborate, network, grow and vent with fellow educators. Being part of our own strong PLN also assists us in understanding what the process is like for our students. Meeting with and stealing from really amazing and creative people is just an added bonus!



