



Teresa Bennet

Tyranny of distance beaten by personal networks

I was always interested, while living and working in a smaller community (Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Western

Australia, population 30,000) in making connections with others working in the same area or with the same interests. I knew I was more likely to learn from others in the same profession, however, living remotely does not make it easy to connect.

It was during my studies that I first came across the term Personal Learning Network (PLN) and realised that I had already, albeit unconsciously, started to connect with others and develop a PLN.

may need on a particular subject.

It is vital to use technology so find online tools that you can use to connect. Above all be flexible. Read blogs, set up an RSS feed for new instalments on blogs or news services you read and follow the links to other items of interest that are mentioned. Join a micro-blogging network, such as twitter or tumblr and connect, comment and follow interesting people in the profession. You will need to update continuously, and this becomes automatic as you access, read, follow and interact with others in your PLN.

I believe my PLN has helped me grow and recently in collaboration with an unofficial mentor, we presented a paper on this subject at the ALIA Access 2010 conference in Brisbane. This was a wonderful opportunity, not only professionally but socially as I met, face to face, many of the

"Soak up the enthusiasm" says Teresa Bennett

I was thrilled to attend the 2008 New Librarians Symposium (NLS4) in Melbourne as I saw this as an opportunity to network with other new librarians and professionals in the industry and above all to connect and 'soak up' all the enthusiasm. I came away inspired to increase my PLN by being acquainted with more than the four people on the attendance list that I knew already.

A definition of a PLN is given by Mary Harlan in her book *Personal Learning Networks: Professional Development for the Isolated School Librarian*: "...it is the people with whom you surround yourself, the tools you use, and the resources you rely on to introduce yourself to new ideas and best practices. It is a network that encourages personal learning and growth."

Starting a PLN gave me the opportunity as a professional working at a distance from the major cities and in a smaller community to connect with others, network, learn and share both within the profession and in the wider community. I've developed my own knowledge network and connect to it daily to support my ongoing learning to help me grow within the profession.

Making connections with a PLN to support your work life and your ongoing learning will not happen spontaneously. You will need to build your network gradually and you will need to work to sustain your connections; to 'give' as well as 'take'. Asking questions and giving links to interesting and thought-provoking comments on our profession is the traffic of my PLN, and the people are the cornerstone.

My advice to others is to start with a couple of colleagues who are willing to share the day to day. These people will help you and start you on the road to good interaction with a larger group of people. If at all possible include a mentor in the mix or someone who you know is a 'mover and shaker' in the industry. Read their work, ask questions and 'pick their brains' for any information you

amazing, sharing library people that I consider part of my PLN.

Over the past three years I have attended conferences and un-conferences, briefly met Michael Stephens of Tame the Web blog and chatted about referencing a 're-tweet' on twitter with Stephen Abram of Stephen's Lighthouse. I have connected with many other people I would consider movers and shakers in the Australian library industry, all through my connections in my PLN. I have, since NLS4, met or interacted online with thirty of the attendees on the list from that conference and am endeavouring to increase that number daily.

This is a great leap from the original four people I knew and a huge boost to my continuing professional development. I encourage you all to consider developing a personal learning network and develop skills in the new web tools, if you haven't done so already. This will enable you to connect and join the conversation with the fascinating librarians online that will help you learn along with them and at your own pace.

Teresa Bennett
tbennett@curtin.edu.au

Teresa Bennett graduated in 2008 from Curtin University. She has been the Branch Librarian at Curtin University's Kalgoorlie Campus Library since 2007.

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"Out on the Edge: using a personal learning network for continuing Professional Development":

conferences.alia.org.au/access2010/pdf/Paper_Thu_1410_Teresa_Bennett.pdf