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Personal Learning Networks:

Using the Power of Connections to Transform Education

By Will Richardson and Rob Mancabelli

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Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Personal Learning Networks: Using the Power of Connections to Transform Education* by Will Richardson and Rob Mancabelli. *Personal Learning Networks* is a step-by-step guide for creating globally connected schools that empower students and teachers to learn in modern ways.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or by an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to create powerful personal and schoolwide learning networks.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create learning networks in your school or district.

Introduction

The Power of Networked Learning

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1. What is a personal learning network (PLN)? How has Mark's PLN affected his cinematography?

2. Describe the difference between *reform* and *transform*. How did the newspaper industry handle the shifts caused by technology? Which route do educators need to take?

3. What is the learning-network divide? What are some of the causes? Why is it important to close this gap? What role might a PLN play in closing this gap?

4. Describe the two problems educators face regarding changing technology. How do you see these playing out in your own school or district? What challenge do the authors extend?

5. What progression leads to becoming a networked school? Where is your school or district in this progression? Where are you in this progression?

Chapter 1

Understanding the Power of PLNs

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1. What are the six significant shifts that support connection and network building? Have you experienced any of these shifts either at school or in your personal life? Describe your experiences. How has learning *not* changed?

2. How can learning networks change the classroom as we see it today? Look at the list of new literacies on page 24. How does your own practice relate to these literacies? What skills must change to accommodate this shift in learning?

3. What are some positive common traits of schools immersed in global learning networks? Discuss why the latest gadgets and tech toys don't necessarily affect this shift.

4. How do we balance the risks and fears of moving forward with the positive changes these connections create? What will students and teachers miss if we choose not to move forward?

Chapter 2

Becoming a Networked Learner

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1. List the guideposts for learning in networks. In which area are you doing best? In which area do you need more work? Why do the authors note that any discussion of specific online tools is difficult? Why are strong networks resilient to these types of changes? What role does connection play?

2. Why do some people think Twitter is silly upon first hearing about it? How do the authors suggest using Twitter to go beyond the mundane and instead become a compelling vehicle for connection?

3. How does Diigo differ from the bookmarks bar on your browser? How might the use of highlights and sticky notes help you? What is an RSS feed? How might you keep from getting overloaded with information in your Google Reader?

4. Describe your experiences with blogs. How is a blog more than an online diary? How does Facebook differ from the other tools the authors have listed regarding the types of connections you make? What suggestions do the authors provide for keeping online tools from becoming overwhelming?

Chapter 3

Implementing a Networked Classroom

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1. How must you change the way you look at the teacher's role in the classroom when creating a learning network? How do you feel about the classroom becoming a community of learners? List the benefits of a networked classroom.

2. What does a networked classroom look like to you? How do you relate to the three stories the authors share? What experts or other classrooms would you like to connect with using technology?

3. List the five methods for using networked learning spaces online in classrooms. Which seem the easiest? Which seem the hardest?

4. Discuss the challenges of the networked classroom. Safety is often a big concern—how do you plan to address this in your learning network? How do you see assessment working in your network? What role will parents play in the networked classroom?

Chapter 4

Becoming a Networked School

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1. Why is it important to have the entire school on board when creating a networked school? What happens when educators fail to participate in these networks? What challenges do you foresee when implementing a schoolwide learning network at your school?

2. What is a *compelling case*? Answer the three questions listed on page 87. What focus might your compelling case have?

3. Who do you want on your change team? Why? What are the pros and cons of having a student representative on the team? How do you plan to engage team members in the learning process while also addressing their fears and concerns?

4. What is the purpose of the pilot, as opposed to simply rolling out the change team's work to the entire school? Consider the planning questions on page 100. What challenges do you anticipate? What are you most excited about?

Chapter 5

Ensuring Success of Learning Network Adoptions

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1. Which of the four hurdles the authors list in this chapter seem to be the biggest challenge to you? Which seem the most manageable?

2. How will one-to-one computing save you money? What is "the cloud"? How can technology create buy-in for families and other stakeholders?

3. What does your current technical support look like? What might need to change to support a schoolwide learning network? How might you involve students in technical support?

4. Many schools and districts have a very strict blocking policy for the Internet. How do the authors suggest addressing and resolving this issue? What first steps might you take to balance safety with access?

5. Which of the "yeah, buts . . ." have you heard, or perhaps even said yourself? How can you address these concerns while continuing to move forward?

Epilogue
The Future of Schooling

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1. Despite the newness of the Internet and other technologies, there are a few themes the authors point out. What are these larger themes?

2. How will this shift in connection and access to the world change the role of the teacher? What role does collaboration play?

3. What differences do you imagine in a current classroom versus a completely networked classroom? What do you look forward to most?