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Personal Learning Environments and Personal Learning Networks

An Introduction

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In this issue of *Teacher Librarian*, four authors look at various components of personal learning environments (PLE).

We all have a personal learning environment, whether we have consciously constructed it or not. A PLE is the space we use for our intellectual development that affects so much of what we use to govern what we know and can do. It may be a bit jagged or often unplanned, but our actions can often be predicted by what we trust as solid information. In our early years, this world may be influenced mostly by parents, our best friends, the gang we joined, the church we attend, and the teachers we respect in school, but it is present, planned or unplanned.

For all of us, the blossoming of the world of the Internet and technology has presented a whole new world grabbing at our attention; demanding that we shop, think, act, and do things in a hundred different ways. Eat or drink this; vote for...; play this game; join this group. The rise of the Arab Spring has taught us all that new and powerful technologies can and are affecting major thoughts and actions, too.

For many, we just turn on the Internet and let all this "stuff" in, only to discover that this juggernaut is rolling over us. We seem to have no tools to control it. Some tech directors have thought it their duty to be the faucets who turn on and off what arrives on our screens. But at some point, don't we all have to take command of our own learning environment rather than allow someone else to do that for us?

Loertscher and Koehlin pose the idea that every learner, whether child, teen, or adult take command of their own learning by constructing a personal learning environment consisting of a portal to the world of information that leads to the development of a personal learning network and results in a portfolio that exhibits our abilities.

In this same spirit of owning our own learning space, Joyce Valenza presents a cadre of peers who have developed their own personal learning networks. She finds that different people listen to different voices; that we don't all listen to the same blogs, but consider a very diverse set of ideas from which we learn and act upon.

Andrew Churches describes the new world of digital learning and proposes that any

learner needs to construct a set of strategies that will enable the best results if they are to be successful.

Thom Markum proposes that the best way to make an impact on learners is to mentor them through project-based learning. It is a time, not just to teach learners how to select a topic and find information; it is a way of thoughtfully confronting the world of information and technology to experience what powerful learning really looks like, feels like, and propels us to really know and deeply understand.

Together, the four articles ask teacher librarians again to reconsider their role in learning. Each teacher librarian grew up in a very narrow learning environment as compared to the one that exists now. We all are noticing that this new generation of digital natives acts much differently in information and digital space than we who are Johnnies-come-lately. We see these social networkers mistake connections for excellence in learning. And we worry, rightfully so, both for ourselves and this new generation. These four articles pose the idea that we as teaching librarians can mentor the children, teens, and adults that surround us into a much more purposeful use of this new environment. As Vi Harada has said, "It is a journey worth leading."