# Reflections on the Personal Learning Network

*By Cindy Tschernitz*

The Personal Learning Network (PLN) offered by the State Library of Victoria (SLV) and the School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV) was established in 2010 and since then over 500 participants have been involved. This year we have around 125 participants and I am one of them.

Prior to starting this journey, I really had little idea of what a PLN was. This is something that I had in common with my fellow new participants. Whilst I had some vague notion of what the words should mean it was important to get some verified information on what it really meant and then look at the merits of the program and what it will mean to me and to SLAV members.

## What is a PLN?

The SLV PLN website states that the PLN is: "Professional development for school library staff and educators, delivered online by the State Library of Victoria and; an ongoing and self-managing professional development network sharing skills, tools, case studies and ideas online'" (Victorian PLN: http://vicpln.global2.vic.edu.au/about-the-pln/).

The objectives for the SLV/SLAV Personal Learning Network participants are:
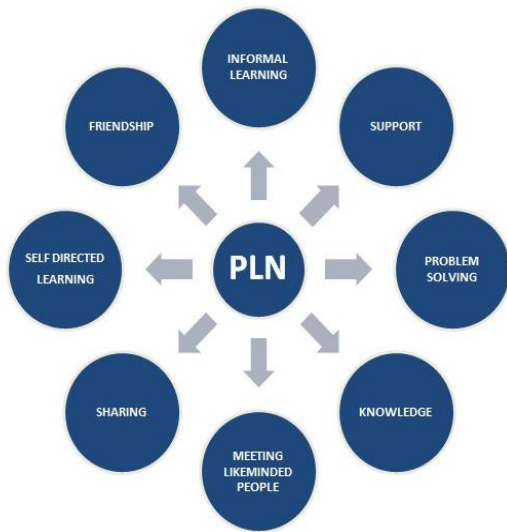
- *Engage in personalised professional development with educators across Victoria and beyond*
- *Build their own personal learning network through a self-paced online learning system*
- *Connect with hundreds of colleagues who share resources and support their learning*
- *Use the web in innovative ways to enrich their teaching and learning experience* (Victorian PLN: http://vicpln.global2.vic.edu.au/about-the-pln/).

All good so far except that it didn't really spell it out in language that I could relate to, i.e. what's in it for me, what's in it for SLAV and how can my participation benefit the SLAV membership at large and can I cope with an online course? Research was undertaken and the following article by Bev Novak 'If you dont have a PLN, you don't know what you are missing' (2012) reassured me that I was not alone and, yes, maybe it is possible to do this successfully.

Bev's definition of a PLN is:

> *The simplest definition is that a PLN is a group of people with whom one connects, communicates and collaborates in the sharing and exchanging of information and ideas, and through whom one increases one's knowledge and understanding of topics of interest* (Novak, 2012).

So a PLN can be on any subject and doesn't always have to be online. It is interesting to think back over time and realise that most of us have been involved in PLNs in one form or another most of our lives, especially when you have been involved in both education and librarianship.

*Diagram created by Bev Novak appears in her blog NovaNews*

**What's in it for me, for SLAV, and how can my participation benefit the SLAV membership at large?**

"Depending on your own interests, members of your PLN may be known or unknown to each other and may have a set of disparate or similar interests or ideas. Most often, they are an extended community of people which stretches across the globe. A key feature is that members of your PLN meet your specific needs for information, knowledge and ideas" (Novak, 2012).

As this PLN is made up predominantly by members of the SLAV community, participating would not only increase my knowledge of what SLAV members are facing but also allow me to actively engage with them as well as learning new tools and applications.

# Reality Check

The best thing about the PLN is sharing – sharing information, sharing sites, sharing stories, sharing learning and sharing fear and trepidation as week 1 commences.

**All things Google seemed to be the flavour of the day – Google maps allowed us to plot where we are and showed us where participants were, Google Readers enhanced our information gathering and Google Docs let us share.**

The PLN provides a way to display your ignorance, prejudices and learnt behaviours in a safe environment. In week 1, participants were challenged to use everyday tools that we had mostly heard of but from the feedback most had not used effectively. All things Google seemed to be the flavour of the day – Google maps allowed us to plot where we are and showed us where participants were, Google Readers enhanced our information gathering and Google Docs let us share. Most people seemed competent, but behind the scenes we were all feeling overwhelmed.

The next few weeks pass in a bit of a blur with tweets, blogs, Facebook, web conferences (Elluminate and Blackboard) and other social bookmarking tools, like DIIGO. The most used word at this time in blogs and Facebook posts is 'confusion'. After the confusion comes questions and obsessions – what happens if I miss a tweet or worse don't tweet, what about my Blog, what if I have

nothing to say? Facebook – something many of us have avoided, my worry being all the dangers associated with putting yourself out there for all and sundry to find. Now the fear is that my page is too dull, not giving enough away, not sharing, or worse, not participating. Mobile devices and applications, how am I going to keep up? Illogical but real thoughts that the 500 people who have been through the PLN would have felt too.

The next stage is consolidation and wonderment, the familiarity of sharing information between friends and colleagues in a safe environment and the thrill of seeing how my PLN colleagues are using the tools and creating excellent teaching and learning resources. There are the online and web conferences, debates and discussions, face to face meetings that have happened and that will happen again, new and exciting times ahead.

The PLN has given me a sense of amazement at what teacher-librarians are doing in their schools, what breadth of skills and knowledge they have, and the enthusiasm that they bring to everything they do. The 'What's in it for me?' question that I asked myself when I started this journey can be answered very simply. How can I not be inspired and involved with such an inspirational group of teacher-librarians?

The PLN a journey that we all should embark on and enjoy. Yes it is the journey, not the destination that is fun.

# References

Novak, Bev (2012) 'If You Don't Have a PLN You Don't Know What You are Missing' *in Connections,* Issue 80, Accessed at:
<http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/scis/issue_80/articles/if_you_dont_have_a_pln.html>.
SLAVConnects -Twitter Page, Accessed at: <https://twitter.com/#!/SLAVConnects>.
The Victorian PLN, Accessed at: <http://vicpln.global2.vic.edu.au/about-the-pln/>.
The Victorian PLN Participants Blog Pages, Accessed at: <http://vicpln.global2.vic.edu.au/2012-participants/>.

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