

Find Your Learning Community



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By Anita McAnear

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No matter what your position is in education—teacher, technology coordinator, administrator, or teacher educator—you need your own learning community. We know that learning needs to be lifelong and that learning is a social activity. Moreover, we know that educators committed to continually learning and improving their practice stand to see the greatest gains in student achievement.

By a learning community, I mean people you can turn to to discuss your professional practice, to glean new skills and strategies, to help problem solve, and if possible, work with to achieve a result.

Being part of an educational institution that is a learning organization with a professional learning community is the best. According to Richard DuFour and Rebecca Eaker in their book, *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*, these are institutions with a shared mission, vision, and values and collaborative teams that practice collective inquiry, are action oriented, experiment, and are ready to be assessed on results. Collaborative teams can be faculty study groups or faculty groups organized to do curriculum mapping; team teachers and even grade-level and curriculum teams are potential learning communities.

If you are lucky enough to be part of a learning organization, your learning community can take advantage of technology to facilitate communication, allow asynchronous contributions, and capture your results. Wikis, blogs, and Google Docs are some of the tools that can help your

learning community manage their discussions and resources and work together on plans.

With or without a face-to-face learning group, you may also want to participate in a virtual learning community. Get the added perspective of educators around the world. Think about how you learn, what you want to learn, and the questions you have.

Educational blogs are a great way to find like-minded educators. Former ISTE board member Kathy Schrock has a list at <http://kathyschrock.net/edtechblogs.htm>. You can also do a search on Technorati.com. Each year a list of the bloggers who post at NECC is posted on the ISTE Web site (<http://www.iste.org/necc>). You can also set Google (<http://www.google.com/alerts>) to send you e-mail updates of the latest relevant Google results based on your choice of query or topic.

Tapped In (<http://tappedin.org/tappedin>) is another great resource that brings educators together through peer networks. Resources, discussions with experts and mentors, and opportunities to meet new colleagues are available to all.

Don't forget to use ISTE. Join other members on Second Life, MySpace, Facebook, or Linked In. For more information, go to <http://www.iste.org> (click on Membership and then Member Networking). You can also join your Special Interest Group's discussion list.

If you have other professional community building ideas or helpful electronic tools for learning communities, please send them to letters@iste.org. ■