

TWITTER AS A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORK FOR TEACHERS

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My name is Diana Maliszewski and I am the teacher-librarian at Agnes Macphail Public School in the Toronto District School Board. Another name I'm known by is @MzMollyTL. That's my Twitter identity. Twitter is a free social networking tool that people use to share their thoughts in 140 characters or less and can be found at www.twitter.com.

I never thought that I would join Twitter. I originally thought that Twitter was only for people to electronically stalk celebrities or make asinine comments about what they were doing at that very moment using their cell phones. In my mind, a typical Twitter post looked like this:



(Translation: Mikey M says: Demi Moore, insanely hot, enough said)

A high school teacher-librarian friend of mine, Lisa Dempster, encouraged me to try it because she found it professionally rewarding. She described how she was able to learn from people in her Twitter PLN – Professional Learning Network. She gushed about how she was able to discuss teaching and learning with other like-minded teachers from all over the world. She was very excited about the new contacts she had made, and her enthusiasm was contagious.

I began cautiously, slowly adding people to my “follow list” (the compilation of Twitter accounts that are directed to your “news feed”) based on the contacts Lisa had on her list. I believed I had nothing to say that was worthwhile, so I “lurked”, reading but never commenting. I started to click on the links that individuals embedded in their tweets (the term used for Twitter posts) and read some in-depth, insightful blog articles on some of the issues I found most intriguing in education. I added more followers to my list. I learned how to use hashtags, short phrases used to link tweets with common themes and topics together.



libmaryann Glenna M

@MzMollyTL Enjoyed the Learning Commons session with your students. Wonderful to get their perspective. Great ideas shared, too. [#sc2011](#)

(In the above example, the hashtag is #sc2011, which stands for Super Conference 2011. If you searched for all the #sc2011 hashtags, you would find all the references made on Twitter about that conference.)

I started to leave comments on blogs (weblogs, online journals) that I had read. I retweeted worthwhile Twitter posts – to retweet is to share someone’s tweet using my account to “spread the word”. I began to have conversations via Twitter with educators I respect and admire from all over the globe.



JulieJohnson Julie Johnson

@MzMollyTL @buffyjhamilton Do you two know each other? If not, thought U might like to meet! I value U both as TL’s! :)

(Translation: Dear MzMollyTL and BuffyJHamilton, Do you two know each other? If not, I thought you might like to meet each other. I value you both as teacher-librarians!)

All my twists and turns on Twitter mirrored those described by Cale Birk in a very clever and insightful post on his blog, *The Learning Nation*. (His post can be found at <http://thelearningnation.blogspot.com/2011/02/evolution-of-twitter-user.html>)

He accurately explained the stages that teachers go through once they join Twitter. He perfectly captured the uncertainty (“Who am I supposed to follow? And for that matter, how the heck do I follow them?”), the discoveries (“Wait, I tweeted and

someone RTd. Is that good?”), and the delights (“Cool stuff they are doing. Kind of looks like what we are doing. Let’s share ours.”) that educators uncover when they participate in Twitter.

I have learned a lot as a teacher from using Twitter. It allows me to work with other teachers who are similarly eager to try integrating technology into the curriculum. Twitter also provides the environment for building a support network to help teachers out when they get stuck. For instance, I found some great ideas for topics to use in classroom blogs by Tom Barrett. I added some of my own to his group spreadsheet and was thanked on Twitter for my contribution. Then, when my students were having difficulty adding their cartoon pictures of themselves (created using www.faceyourmanga.com) to the blog, I sent out a call for help and a grade one teacher with expertise in blogging offered to help determine the problem.



[tombarrett](#) tombarrett

Updated > 41 Interesting Ideas for Class Blog Posts <http://bit.ly/esuHeZ> thanks to [@MzMollyTL](#) for the latest ideas



[Grade1](#) Aviva Dunsiger

[@MzMollyTL](#) I just emailed you. I’m not sure what the problem is. I was able to upload a photo no problem. Do you know the error message?

Twitter does not just help with the practical side of teaching. My Professional Learning Network on Twitter has helped me to think about my beliefs about teaching. For the longest time, I tried not to use my real name on any public web site. It was Gwyneth Jones, a teacher-librarian in Maryland, who encouraged me to use my real name in my Twitter biography. As she succinctly put it,



[gwynethjones](#) gwynethjones

@MzMollyTL YAY You! IMHO Being Transparent & creating a pos.digi footprint is no longer optional for outstanding educators! [#Edchat](#) [#TLChat](#)

(Translation: Dear MzMollyTL, Yay for you. In my honest opinion, being transparent and creating a positive digital footprint is no longer optional for outstanding educators.)

Now I'm at the point where I am collaborating with a special education teacher in Barrie on a joint project involving using Mario Kart for Wii (a video game) in a cross-school tournament, and with a secondary teacher-librarian in Waterloo on co-writing a comic using www.bitstripsforschools.com based on a workshop in which we participated.

The joy of using Twitter to meet and share with like-minded educators beyond the school walls relates to the theme of *Antistasis Volume 1*, Issue 2. The promise of progress often wilts in schools where most people want to keep to the status quo and aren't interested in the specific educational areas individuals wish to explore and pursue. Without mentors or supporters to encourage experimentation that will benefit student learning, some teachers may not have the energy to try on their own. For the longest time, I was the only educator I knew that was interested in using video games in the classroom. Now I've discovered that there is a huge subculture of games-based education, and thanks to the resources from a new Twitter friend, Julie Johnson, I've discovered The Consolarium, a Scottish group dedicated to the study of the benefits of video games in schools, and the EDGE (Experiential Design and Gaming Environments) Lab at Ryerson University in Toronto. I use what I learn on Twitter to think about what I do in the classroom and to try new technology tools to help my students learn. I find myself checking my Twitter account more than once a day, eager to see what my PLN can offer. Twitter is also a great resource for quick, first-person accounts of news as it happens around the world. It's not only educators that can learn in 140 character chunks!

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