What I know about

twitter

a white paper brought to you by SLN Education

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http://etap687.edublogs.org/about-2/

Without a doubt or without any reservation i say that twitter has been the most powerful influential professional development experience in my life.

It is a vibrant exciting living expression of my community of practice.

It gives me (& my students) access to experts all over the world that i might never have met otherwise. And it gives me a forum in which to document my work, express myself, interact with others, and establish my own professional presence, credibility, and level of expertise.

It is not an overstatement 4 me to say that i <heart> twitter :)

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what it is

twitter is a social networking and microblogging service used by friends, family, and co–workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: "What are you doing?" However, if you still think it is only about what people had for lunch, then you are not doing it right–you are following the wrong people. Though there is a lot of "noise" in twitter, the key is to broadcast and tune into what you define as your "signal" –something you are *passionate* about. twitter is about the links and information shared, topic-specific conversations (#hashtags), interactions, and real-time accounts of real news or events.

how it works

twitter gives you 140 characters in which to express yourself about something. The prompt "what are you doing?" or "what's happening?" can get you started, but the key is you only have 140 characters with which to synthesize a cogent, articulate, provocative, interesting, informative thought. Everyone's first tweet is "this is stoopid," or "i don't get this" You have to be in it to do it. And you have to do it to get it. You have to follow people that engage you. You have to post stuff that engages others. You have to make real connections & interact with others. You have to share with, and recognize those you interact with and learn from.

what I did

I joined twitter in January 2007. At first I used twitter to document my exploration of web2.0 technologies for instructional purposes. I used it only professionally, and slowly discovered access to, and community with, individuals with whom I shared an affinity for instructional technology. As my network of connections grew and I got to know them through their "tweets," and I grew more comfortable with the conventions of interaction in the medium, I began to respond to, and engage with members of my PLN (personal learning network). My enthusiasm for twitter grew as I learned, interacted, engaged and shared more and more.

how I did it

I used to follow everyone that followed me. I don't do that anymore. I now have very specific criteria that I use to determine whether or not I will follow someone, or let them follow me (http://tinyurl.com/pk5kp9). I searched for people in my field that I knew, or respected to follow. I looked at people who followed those I respected and at whom they followed to find other interesting people to follow. I learned so much from my twitter community of practice and got so much satisfaction out of it, that I wanted to figure out how to introduce my students to the benefits of twitter. So, in 2008 I decided to add it as an element of my online course. I created a course-specific account (http://twitter.com/etap687) – a separate account from my personal twitter account. And I decided to use it as a way to make short news-flash type course announcements.

why I did it

I explore, test, evaluate ,and document technology for instructional purposes. I decided to explore the instructional potential of twitter because I want to expose my students to and engage my students in *my* learning process, so that they understand that I am a learner too. I want to model that for them. I want my students to participate with me in this moment in time where this phenomenon of social media and the social web is exploding into the mainstream and changing things–lots of things–radically. I also want them to have the experience of using twitter in an authentic context and for academic and professional development purposes. I am also always looking for (1) ways to enhance the presentation of online content, (2) ways to facilitate engaging and interactive online collaborations, and (3) ways to enhance how I provide engaging feedback to my online students. I love that, like many web2.0 technologies, twitter provides a cool little widget that you can embed in your website or blog (http://twitter.com/goodies/widgets). I also loved the idea that I could add announcements to my course without being logged in to it - (you could even do it from your cell phone). My criteria for evaluating technology for instructional

twitter is:

- a micro-blog
- a community of practice (PLN, PLE)
- access to experts and colleagues
- a forum to share links and resources
- a forum to ask & answer questions
- serendipitous learning, micro-learning, synchronous learning
- a way to keep up-to-date

tips

1. don't just follow people you know
2. don't just follow rockstars
3. twitter is not FB
4. you have to do it to get it!

twitter links & resources

http://tinyurl.com/34jmkmv

http://twitter.com/etap687

http://tinyurl.com/327fs5t

twitter in plain english video:

http://tinyurl.com/384n2f

twitter in the classroom:

http://tinyurl.com/2u4n5wp

7 things you should know about twitter:

http://tinyurl.com/lxzx43

teaching & learning with twitter:

http://tinyurl.com/2wylwzf

http://tinyurl.com/2wqo97w

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purposes is that it must help me achieve an instructional objective *better, faster, safer, easier or cheaper.* Exposing my students to the course twitter stream and to my personal tweets helped me create and maintain a dynamic social and teaching presence in my course and to establish trust and credibility with my students . Through our use of twitter we extended the sense of class community with each other beyond the boundaries of the online course itself, by providing us with another mechanism to facilitate information sharing and interaction. In terms of my criteria, twitter assists me to share, interact, and communicate with my students *better, faster and easier.*

what happened when I did it

None of my students have ever had a twitter account before my course. My students are in an education masters program (http://tinyurl.com/38vax32). They are pre- and in-service educators at all levels. The first semester that I used twitter in my online course, I just used it to post short news-flash type announcements to the course. I listed it as a component of the course, but getting an account and interaction was optional. Of course, no one used it. The second semester, I made it required that students get an account and that they follow me, the course twitter stream, and each other. I also spent some time in twitter with each student, helping them to find people to follow that would engage them professionally. Students used it and we even got a tweet from the hospital just after one of my students had her baby (http://twitter.com/jjbfost/status/1996382683 and http://twitpic.com/7pi2p). The third semester I added more documentation to the course regarding the required participation in twitter. I added it to my contact information page, indicating that I could be contacted and would provide quick replies via twitter. I added a document on "tools" used in the course in which I explained what twitter is and how it is used in the course. I made getting an account and following the course stream and me a required assignment.I followed up with feedback and to make sure everyone completed the activity in a timely way. I made a point of contacting students individually via twitter, demonstrating the public and private ways to interact. I gave them encouraging and corrective feedback on their participation and interactions. I pointed them to resources, made suggestions on whom to follow tailored to their individual interests, and I modeled a variety of types of "tweets" and conventions in the context of the course, so they could see how it is done. I did all that in twitter and I made a point of retweeting their tweets, and tweeting about their blogs, and about them and our course, and directed them to each other to facilitate their interactions between each other. As a result, this last semester was the most active and interactive semester in twitter so far.

what i learned

I learned that just because students are young and supposedly *digital natives* doesn't mean that they have used all the new and latest technologies, or that they will automatically embrace their use, or even know how to use a new technology for professional or academic purposes. You have to guide them. They need to understand how to use it, and how to find help if they need it. They need to understand why you are using it in the course and why you want them to use it - they need to understand what the benefit is to their real life, They also need to know what your expectations are in terms of their use of it in the course, and how they will be evaluated.

try it (step by step)

Create a twitter account at http://twitter.com. Choose a username. Add an avatar and customize your profile. Post your first tweet. Choose to follow some people you respect, admire, or that share your passion. Look at whom those people follow and who follows them to find people to follow. Then just watch your twitter stream for a couple of days whenever you think of it, or have a little time. Don't worry about what you have missed, or going back too far in the stream. Follow links that are tweeted that you find interesting. Tweet what you learn from them. Ask questions, if you don't understand something. RT something you find interesting. DM someone you know. Follow a hashtag chat and participate, for example, #lrnchat, #edchat, or #techchat (see the twitter links & resources (left) for additional twitter-related information, including education-related hashtags to follow). Here is a resource to get you started: http://prezi.com/qlrwf_cuenc1/powerful-uses-of-twitter/