

In the Classroom 36

Ways to Use Twitter in the College Classroom

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Stan Skrabut: Welcome back. Thanks for taking time to listen to this podcast. What are you doing when you're listening to the podcast? Are you driving? Are you walking, or are you just sitting there listening to the podcast? It doesn't matter. Whatever you doing, I really appreciate it because I just do. Anyway, thanks. Today, we are going to wrap up our discussion on Twitter in the classroom. We're going to look at specific ways that you can introduce Twitter and use it for increasing engagement in your particular classroom. Let's get started.

Before you get really started with Twitter, just like anything, you're going to have to scaffold it into your course. You can't just dump Twitter on students and expect them to just run with it. You have to walk them into it. You certainly want to teach them how to set up their account, put together an avatar and a bio and all those things dealing with Twitter. Then you probably should spend some time showing them how to send a tweet, how to retweet, how to send a direct message, adding images and video and all those different things that make Twitter just a little more exciting.

Those are some basic things. I would also touch on teaching your students about netiquette, the proper etiquette for being on the internet. These tweets are there forever. You think you can delete something, but these things stay a long time. A lot of politicians have found this out. Going in and specifically talk to them on how to be good digital citizens is important. Then also teach them how to use a hashtag, and perhaps how to use some of the tools that they can better manage their Twitter account.

For some, it's just using the Twitter app and being able to post and see things on Twitter app. For others, you want to maybe you teach them how to use the tool like TweetDeck where they can save searches and they can set up queries. This is going to be useful depending on what you're doing in your class. Let's talk about some of the cool stuff that you can do in your class.

First of all, last episode, episode number 35, we talked about using a backchannel. That is a great place to start by having students go ahead and have a conversation about what's going on in the classroom and contributing to Twitter to keep this thing going. Ways that you may want to initially incorporate this even as part of this backchannel is, for example, to live-tweet a book review or live-tweet a movie that you are watching. It can be in the classroom that as they're watching the movie, that they also contribute on Twitter what their perceptions are. Or as you're discussing a book, that they can share their insights about the book on Twitter.

Note-taking. Note-taking is another powerful way that you can use Twitter. I talked about this in episode 35 on the backchannels where you can have some students in

your class dedicated as note-takers for that particular class, and they capture everything on Twitter. The fact that people can then add and expand on these tweets can make it that much more powerful. Here are some ways that you can extend your classroom, your management, and how you operate your classroom just by using Twitter.

First of all, great for asking simple questions. That you can ask them about the muddiest point. You can ask them when they first get into class what things that they're struggling with. You can use it to ask them questions and get their feedback. Questions can be a central part of this to help you move forward. That you can assign them to do reading before the class and to make some post it to Twitter on what they thought were important items, or what questions they had about the content. That way, you can review it before you get into class and start having a discussion right away.

If you have a large class, what you can do is have students ask questions ahead of time, or in the class, pull them together so you can craft a response and out that out to students later. You want to make sure that you get the most common questions answered, but you also have some of those outliers. Sometimes, it can just be overwhelming if you have a large class trying to answer everyone while still trying to get through your content. You can use Twitter as a conduit for collecting those, and then you can categorize them and sift through them, and make it work.

Other ways that you can use this to support your classroom? Sending out reminders. Upcoming tests, any projects that are due. Any news that you want to share with your class, you can use Twitter as a way to do that. As you are getting for and prepping for an exam or having students prep for an exam, you can use Twitter as a place where you can post questions that are related maybe to the material that's going to be on the exam and let them know that the next class, you will go over these particular questions. In the meantime, it gives them an opportunity to hash this out over Twitter. You can encourage them to post the answers and see where there is any gaps in learning.

There's tools out there that you can schedule tweets that you send out. You can systematically put together a series of questions and possibly answers that you are dripping out maybe on the hour that you are posting a new question. What you can do is make this a little competitive or hand out bonus points that students have to respond maybe in an email or some other mechanism, and whoever gets the right answer is that you can give bonus points, that's entirely up to you.

You can also, ahead of time, schedule study tips or hints or updates to the syllables. Anything in your class that you can send it out in real-time. You're sitting there maybe waiting for a meeting to start, and you get on Twitter, "I just thought of this," and you can push it out to your students. Or if you know the structure of your class, you could actually schedule a lot of tweets to come out at specific times all thorough a term. You can schedule these things, and it's like magic. You don't even have to do anything, and these tweets will start going out automatically.

Other ways that you can use this. Post and puzzles that students need to solve. Putting out samples or supplementary materials that you can share with students. You can also use it to summarize your lecture presentation. That, or you can put them into a

collection of these tweets that highlight the key points that are in your presentation or lecture. You can also ask students to highlight what their key points are as part of your presentation.

Another idea that's really tied to your classroom is that teaching moment of the day. That something brilliant comes out of your class, or something specifically interesting, or you see something that students are not necessarily getting it right, and you can go out and highlight that moment. Have that teaching moment of the day type post. This is really tied to teaching any time. Any time that you see something, you can get on Twitter and shoot out a message right away, giving this bite-size information of that teachable moment. When you're teaching a class, sciences come to mind that have a lot of terminology, it could be nursing, that you can put out terms and definitions and just keep a flood of these things coming out throughout your class just to keep it going.

For English, it could be related to certain quotes that are happening in a book. Right now, I just finished reading a book that looked at the architecture for books and how they're putting it out and how the series are all put together and being able to highlight that, for example. Or any type of activities.

Another place that you can use Twitter is create a newsfeed where you and your students are collecting news related to your topic. It could be talking about political science. You may be working on an issue, and anytime news comes up, that you can use Twitter to highlight that and spread the word through your class to be able to keep him informed but also create engagement related to that specific topic.

You can also use Twitter for office hours. Maybe students can't come to your office hours because they are in another class, or they're working but they still want to engage with you. You can use Twitter to collect their input and respond back to them. Depending on how the message came in, you can do this in a public format where everybody gets to see the questions and answers, or you can have them direct-message where it's more private and you're able to better control that.

Research. Oh my God. Twitter is a amazing tool for conducting research. It is the number one search engine for what's happening in real time. Google deals with a lot of stuff with the past. YouTube, they take care of how-to, showing videos on that. Twitter is really about real-time information, that is, in the near past, so things that you can track.

First of all, Twitter's search is really powerful. You can use operators in there to control the scope, that maybe you only want to see what posts are within 25 miles of a certain zip code. You can certainly put together a query like that. You also can geo track information. You can plot this information on a map, and there's ways that you can do that, but also just tapping into real-world data, conducting surveys to individuals out in the world. With all this information, you can just pull it together. Tracking weather patterns. If that happens to be what you're doing, you can very easily ask people what the temperature is in their part of the world and then be able to plot that.

They say that you can find the center of an earthquake quicker with Twitter than you can on a geological survey. Don't necessarily believe that, but you can definitely find

the epicenter of an earthquake especially if it's happening on land, simply by the magnitude of tweets that are coming out at that moment, and you can narrow down where the epicenter is. Ways that you can do that, which then with this trying to do a search on Twitter, you can set up search queries and TweetDeck and follow those search queries and keep an eye on any time there is traffic patterns that meet your queries. Which then allow you to track events, objects, people, a variety of different things, based on what you're putting in there.

Projects that you can have your students work on as-- Maybe there's famous people out there in the world. They could be industry leaders, they could be scientists, celebrities, across the gamut. You can have them follow those specific people and report out results that they have in projects or papers that they're writing.

Being able to follow experts in the field. We talk about these experts regularly in our classes, that there are individuals that have had scientific breakthroughs, that there's top leaders in every industry, that you can be following these people to get real-world up-to-date information from these people that you can weave into your class, that you can open up a class and say, "Okay, we are talking about this specific individual, let's see what they've been talking about related to this topic." You can bring that up in the classroom and start the discussion that way. We're always looking for ways that you can gather interest. This is one of those ways that you can get interest in a particular topic.

Students can also keep track of events or their communities, or a social cause, and they can also report out on this, and they can in turn become a local expert if they're out there reporting on this information. One of the number one tools that politicians use to get the word out is Twitter and Facebook. Those are the number one and two tools out there for getting the word out. You can definitely keep track of what's going on. You can probably notice that there's one individual at the very highest level of the American Government that uses Twitter extensively. Not saying this is necessarily a great role model, but he definitely understands the power of this tool and is using it to circumvent other institutions.

Twitter can definitely be a powerful tool, but it's important that we understand how to use this. To watch an event. If you're going to a conference, conferences usually have a hashtag associated with them. There's also other events that are happening that you can discover what the hashtags are. Every year we have the State of the Union. I have found it to be a very fascinating exercise to watch the State of the Union, but also watch the feed related to the State of the Union on Twitter, and so just narrowing that down to what the public is thinking, at the same time what's being discussed as part of the State of the Union.

Any Government agency. NASA has probably one of the largest Twitter and Facebook accounts out there that you can keep an eye on what NASA is doing, and the great work that they are sharing out to the public, but other agencies are doing this. All the military branches have this going on. Basically, all the agencies of the federal government have a Twitter account running that you can tap into and see what's going on in your classroom in real-time, keep up to date. You can track specific words. If you're seeing a word show up that you can track this, but you can also see how the

word is being used in google trends, and be able to look at one word compared to another. Exploring different careers that we're always trying to line our students up for a career. Well, Twitter is a great place to set up a listening post so you can follow this particular career.

Another great way of using Twitter is to promote content that, at the end of the day, it would be great if our students became known, that they established their brand which is their name, and they were able to show off some of the great work that they're doing while they're students. Twitter is a great place where they can promote this content. They can share photos with others, they can share their blogs or other student media that they have out there. You can create a hashtag around information that students are sharing and put that out there for display for others to tap into. Having a virtual art gallery, for example, where students can show off the work that they've created through all the different arts. But it's a way that they can help with this personal branding and to become known commodities in the world.

Brainstorming. That's another great place that you can just pose questions. We talked about questions, but use this as a brainstorming tool where individuals start posting things and other people read it, then they can post on other things. You never know that you may have people outside your classroom contributing to this idea generation.

Collective creation. What I mean by collective creation is that you can use Twitter to build something unique. For example, writing a story one tweet at a time. Students start with a sentence and follow the thread, and somebody else adds to it. You can help define characters, scenes, dialogue, basically tweeting stories. That's a way that you can use Twitter. Practicing a foreign language. English is not the only language that is using Twitter. There are streams of tweets coming out in all kinds of languages. If you are a language learner tapping into some of these folks who regularly tweet in a different language can help with language that you can tap into news feeds from different countries, and follow what's being shared on those news feeds. You can use that as a starting point in a conversation in the classroom.

Other ways that you can use Twitter is partnering with local organizations, discussing culture and education events that are happening related to those organizations, that you can support different movements, be able to promote that cause, and Twitter is a great place to do that.

Creating a classroom newspaper where individuals participate by using tweet. Which brings me up to some tools that you can use. If you're going to build a classroom newspaper, one of the tools that you may want to consider is called Paper.li, paper dot L-I, Paper.li. This tool will aggregate basically a newsletter. You can build this by adding a hashtag, and then Paper.li will pull this all together, and you can indicate what the distribution is going to be, maybe once a week or daily, it's entirely up to you. It does more than just report back to tweet. It will expand the information, it will show you the images that this is all part of. This is a great way of pulling information.

I have a number of Paper.li newspapers that come to me, and I review the news on those different topics, so I've been able to create topical newsletters. If you wanted to create one around chemistry, you could do that, or psychology. You can look for

specific search queries or hashtags, what-have-you, and build a newspaper around that. Paper.li is a really powerful tool.

You can also do this with a tool called Flipboard. With Flipboard, you can pull in these tweets, and it will present that information in something that's a little more attractive than Twitter. I have to be honest, Twitter is not always the most attractive information, but if you're trying to gain interest, then Flipboard may be a tool that, when it aggregates this and presents it, it is quite attractive.

Then finally, I-F-T-T-T, if this, then that. You can tie basically two applications together so you pull in information that any time a tweet happens based on a certain hashtag, then it will save, for example, to a spreadsheet, and you can pull that all together and present that information in a spreadsheet. Something that I use for conferences all based on a hashtag, and then-- Yes, quite useful.

Those are some things. Hopefully, those are some ideas that you may want to consider in your classroom to use Twitter. Very powerful. It's up to your imagination how you could use this, but this may give you some ideas to get started. Certainly, if you have questions, shoot me a note, put them in the comments, I'd love to address those. But in the meantime, hopefully I'll see you on Twitter. I can be found at Skrabut, that's my Twitter handle, and that's where I mostly hang out, so come join me there. With that, I will put a plug in for my book.