

In the Classroom 33

How to Start Using Twitter in Your Classroom

SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT: <http://tubarksblog.com/itc33>

Stan Skrabut: Well, welcome back. Thanks for taking the time to listen to my podcast. I really appreciate it. I know you can be doing other things but you're hanging out with me and you don't know how much I do appreciate that. This week we're going to look at how we can weave Twitter into the classroom. Twitter you say, why would we want to weave Twitter in the classroom? Well, it happens to be one of my power tools but not only me, it ranked number four of the top 200 learning tools. This is a list that Jane Hart from the center for learning and performance technology. She's been putting this list together for the last 12 years and Twitter has consistently been one of those tools. When you look at search engines, you have certainly Google Google's number one as far as the search engine. Number two is YouTube, but number three is Twitter.

Twitter lets you see what's going on in real-time. I have been looking at how to use Twitter in the classroom since about 2010 and I've been curating links ever since then. When I first started working with the extension a long time ago, one of the tools, matter of fact, about 10 years ago, yes, in 2010 that one of the first workshops that I did was using Twitter to support extension. When I proposed this, she thought I had three heads, the way they were looking at me, but I told them, I said, you are going to see Twitter come on the scene. I am very confident that you've heard about Twitter. Some of them may be good, some of them may be bad, but without a doubt, you've probably heard Twitter. Over the next four episodes, we're going to take a deep dive into using Twitter in the classroom. In this particular episode, I'm going to share what Twitter is, why you should use it, and tips for getting started as well as things to avoid.

Let's get started. First of all, what is Twitter? Twitter is a microblogging tool. This means that you are putting out content and it comes out chronologically. When you're looking at a Twitter stream, it is very much a stream of information and it can be overwhelming, but fortunately, there's ways to control it, but with Twitter, you're sending out messages in 280 characters at a time and you're thinking, well what can you do with that? You'd be amazed on what is possible sending out just simple tweets and that's what the message is called from Twitter. It's called a tweet at 280 characters at a time. You can use it for communication, for engagement. You can use it to ask questions, to share information, to network with others and track, people and what they're doing because people have been very good about sharing what's going on in the world.

Now, most of the bad publicity about Twitter is, well, I don't care about somebody and what they're eating for lunch. You're right. If you're doing that with Twitter, then stopped doing that because no one cares, but there are all kinds of different things that you can share. When you're sharing a tweet in that tweet, you can have texts, you can

have links to documents and other resources. You can have links to images or show images and videos.

Who's using Twitter? Well, HootSweet put out an article, talking about the statistics of Twitter, and right now there is about 333, anywhere from 325 to 330 million people using Twitter every month. This is around the same population for the whole United States. That is how many people are using it every month. 24% of US adults are using Twitter. This tends to skew towards those folks that are in urban educated, higher-income categories. 80% of Twitter users are affluent millennials. 45% of Americans are between 18 and 25-year-olds who are using Twitter. Just to think of volume, half a billion tweets are sent each day. Half a billion. That's quite a number. What are they using it for? Primarily folks who are using it, that 71% are using Twitter to get their news, see on what's going on. Believe it or not, if you've been following our president, you could probably confirm this. Twitter is the number one platform for government leaders. Okay, that's fine. Why should you be using Twitter in your classroom?

I went and scoured through all my articles. I had about 142 articles curated and I went back through all those articles that some of them don't exist anymore, but when I've updated the rest of them, but two articles kind of stood out on why you would want to use Twitter in the classroom. One of the articles was embracing the Twitter classroom and the other was 10 reasons Twitter works in education. I just kind of pulled those together but I've also included those in the show notes. These articles chaired some great information from the teach thought, staff and also from Howard Rheingold who teaches at UC Berkeley school of communication and Stanford University.

They summed up pretty much a lot of the thoughts that I had on why we would want to use Twitter in the classroom. One of the first reasons is that we need to help students develop this idea of digital literacy. They use their tools, but sometimes they don't use them well. We need to show them how to use those tools in a professional setting, especially since social media is playing such a big part, in the lives of people today. The other reason is, students are bringing mobile devices and computers into the classroom. They can be very disruptive unless you can harness them. If you can harness them, then they can be a very powerful learning tool in the classroom. I'm a huge fan of bringing your computer. We're going to put it to work, and one way of doing that is through Twitter.

We talk about that. We want students to be engaged, we want students to develop a community and Twitter is one of those tools that happen to be a social media tool, and the key part of that is social. We can leverage those skills by learning in real-time and also learning in the real world.

Another reason is there's only so much class time that there's a lot of things that we want to cover. We don't have all the class time to do it. What we can do is leverage Twitter to extend the class time just a bit. In a future episode, I'll talk about different ideas that you can use specifically to do that.

Another reason for Twitter, and we use this for online discussion boards also, is we have some students that will kind of be wallflowers that they'll, they'll just kind of listen to what the conversation and by having an online messaging board that you can draw

out those students. There's something about the almost anonymity to it that they will go out and participate.

Other reasons for it. Twitter is one of those mainstream social media tools. It's built up a sense of credibility and folks are familiar with it. Because it's familiar, it's easier to weave into the instruction because so many people have heard about it. What I consider really powerful features of Twitter is the fact that you're tapping into the real world in real-time. They say that you can find the center of an earthquake quicker on Twitter than through geological surveying. I don't necessarily believe that, but it is pretty darn quick when people were getting up in the middle of the night saying, "Hey, we have an earthquake," but the fact that you're tapping into the real world, one of the things about Twitter, when few start using in your classroom, the real world will start leaking into your class. This can be fascinating and it's also a little unnerving.

The other thing about Twitter is you're dealing with a real audience. There's also an instant audience. Once you start sending out tweets, using the strategies of hashtags and commenting to direct people, you are going to get responses back. This can be a powerful tool for students if they've never participated in that. With Twitter, you can work in a passive environment where you're just sitting back, setting up a listening post, lets things come in or where you're actively engaged in the conversation. It can go from both ways, depending on what kind of assignments. You can assign something where you're having your students just follow somebody and reporting on what is transpiring, but you can also have them engage in the conversation.

Twitter is also very flexible. You can use it for a listening post, but you can also curate lists. You can tie it into other tools like IFTTT which is if this then that and collect things in spreadsheets and then do further research and analysis on it. Lots of different things. I'll talk about one example coming up. You can certainly personalize this. Going in and setting up your avatar and your username, you can also put in a description and there's lots of different ways that you can kind of personalize this. If necessary if or if you want, you can also remain anonymous. You don't have to go in and declare, this is my name, but depending on what the reasons that you're setting up Twitter, you can have something that's more anonymous and it leaves a record.

For some politicians, this could be things that they don't want to see again, but it does leave a record. That is really important as you are creating content, that you are representing yourself and also your institution. When students are getting out there, that we are finding things in the news depending on the career they're going into. That the things that they said while they were young and brash, is now coming back to haunt them, so something to be concerned about. There is also metrics, you can keep track of how many posts that you had. There is other metrics, other third-party tools that you can tie into and you can see how much engagement that you have, and what kind of reach that you have. Those are some of the reasons for getting started with Twitter. Like I said, I think it's a tremendously powerful tool and it will definitely do something to your classroom.

How to get started. First place to go is twitter.com, create an account. Keys to this, make sure that you keep a short username. You don't want something very long that you don't want that egghead out there, so you need to personalize it with images,

something that's easily identified. It can be you, recommend that. I tweet under my name, matter of fact, I have had up to six Twitter accounts running at one time because I had accounts for my personal stuff, for my side hustle, for my work, for a volunteer organizations. All those different accounts. I was managing a lot of-- because I had different roles, I had different accounts that I was using. Your bio, you want to include a bio. Keep it brief, informative and if you have a URL may be back to a website that you have, make sure that you include that. Once you've set up all those things, Twitter is going to ask you to start following certain people. They will provide a list then you can go ahead and select them and you can get rid of them after the fact, but that will just get you started.

In the show notes, I have included lists of different groups mostly surrounding education which there are a lot of folks that are going out and using Twitter in amazing ways that you should tap into. They are sharing all kinds of wonderful knowledge. As you're doing your search queries, I would encourage you to go ahead and start developing lists around different people. I would set up lists around instructional technology, on gamification. People I knew that were talking in those areas I would add them to a list and or directly follow them. Most folks will tend to follow back.

Once you have your account up and going, and then also you've started following certain people, I would set up a listening post. Now, I have a tool that I use for that. It's called TweetDeck. TweetDeck allows me to create listening posts. Based on the lists that I've created in Twitter, I set up a column in TweetDeck just to watch the posts of people in different lists. That way I can keep track of the conversations that are happening in those particular lists.

Other things that you can do is you can follow and track a hashtag. Now, a hashtag is nothing amazingly special, it's the number sign, that is the shift three followed by a word, a one-word, then usually, words are put together to make one word. What this does is it creates a filter. By using a hashtag, and following that specific hashtag, any post that has that hashtag in it, you will see. What it does is it just filters the conversations so you think of it as a large cocktail party, that's how I've heard of it described, where when you walk into the room, you hear this buzz of conversation and you can't really make anything out but then you go to this one table, and they're talking about instructional technology or on student engagement. Now you're really focused on that conversation and you're not aware so much of other conversations because you've gone to that specific table. Well, that's the same thing with a hashtag, it just kind of narrows the conversation.

You can also set up columns or things to watch based on search queries. Like I said, Twitter is a very powerful search tool, it's the third most powerful used tool for researching. Its power comes in the fact that it's doing things in realtime. I would encourage you to in and do a search for the phrase, "My professor" and it is just fascinating. I happen to come across this in an article which I will share in the short notes where the individual writing this, and I don't have their name right off top of my head, basically they did their study about Twitter, and it kind of all circled around this search term, "My professor." What students were sharing about the professors that they had. I thought it was definitely worth looking into.

Let me dive into some other strategies that will help you be more successful. Once you've gotten all those things set up, you've got your account setup, you've followed some people, you've set up a listening post. Now let's hear some strategies that you can use in your course to help it be more successful. We'll talk about some more things in upcoming episodes. One is, assign your course a hashtag and require everybody to use the hashtag when they're creating posts. For example, I'm teaching a student success seminar, it's INT1520, I would create a hashtag #INT1520. You want to keep your hashtag really short, you don't want to do the whole student success seminar INT1520, that is just too long. Keeping it down to INT1520.

Now, before you do that, I would encourage you to go onto Twitter and do a search for your hashtag, the one that you are going to propose and see if anyone else is using it. You don't want to jump into a conversation that maybe is a little risky so you want to make sure that you do a search there. Then make sure that you let your student know what the hashtag is. This could be in the syllabus, this could be in your learning management system, in all the posts that you put on Twitter make sure that you have that hashtag and that way, students will use this.

The other thing that you are going to want to do is to provide some training to your students on how Twitter works. Scuffle this learning., You may think well, they should already know how to do this, they don't. Also like I'm in a community college, if we get students we may have some students that are on the older spectrum, that are not native to mobile devices. Providing some kind of training upfront, that's kind of useful. One way you can do this is and this individual Jason's Lawrence, he is from Rutgers University School of Communication and Information. He shares his strategy that he uses, is first have everybody get on to Twitter, create their account while you are up in front of the room and showing this on the big screen and showing how this hashtag works and emphasize that. Then have students tweet one thing that they would like to learn during the semester and make sure that they include the hashtag. Depending on what tool you have, you'll start seeing this populated right in front of your eyes as people start posting things. Also then ask another question, you can post a question in Twitter, make sure that you include the hashtag but have a question that everyone then responds to. Then step four is, have everyone find a post they like and re-tweet it. There is a process for how to re-tweet posts as part of Twitter and it's pretty simple to do, you just find the post you like, click on the retweet button and off it goes. That will get them started. It's important that you do take that moment to get them engaged and get them moving correctly on how to use the tool.

Now, other things that you want to do, make sure that you clarify the language around Twitter. Twitter has its own taxonomy, it's own jargon and so make sure that you define your terms and you may even want to create a glossary to have those terms available for them as well as acronyms that are used. RT is retweet, DM is direct message so by putting that information into a glossary that can speed up the process.

Although this is something that we are going to talk about more in other episodes, but one of the things that you may also want to do is start identifying people on Twitter who are worth following. There are some very smart people doing very clever things on Twitter and having your students, teaching them how to search on Twitter to find these people, how to build lists, how to start following these people and adding them

as people that they follow and pretty soon they're going to have their own followers, but being able to see who the influences are of whatever field that you're teaching. It could be human services, it could be business administration. It doesn't matter it's out there and getting people to do that.

If you want Twitter to be successful, there has to be a pain point. I would it wasn't this way but this is how education is. You're going to have to require the use of it. It's going to have to be a graded activity, or honestly, students really won't pay attention to it. It's not necessarily an easy thing to do. I mean, it's very easy. Twitter's not hard, but to get it into a regular practice takes a little additional time. Other things that you may want to do with Twitter participate in what are called tweet chats. Tweet chats are events that are held at a specific time. You can hold your own tweet chat.

If you have a guest speaker, perhaps that you do this as a tweet chat instead of maybe face to face or maybe as part of Skype or something or you can do things in conjunction. That you have a guest speaker coming up on Skype but you also have your students asking questions using Twitter. They can do this. Maybe the day before or even during class, that you're curating questions and you can use those questions to interact with your guest speaker.

Live-tweeting lectures or maybe TED talks or other events that having students take notes using Twitter in this live feed. Things that jumped out to them. All of them will put it into their words. It can be a very powerful tool for this engagement. You can use it to look back on things and see how that all applied in your class. Other ways that you can use it is sending out course materials and resources. Anytime you find something great, there's usually a button somewhere on that website, for example, that you click on and say "Tweet this" All you have to do is add your hashtag and it'll be sent to your students. You can also add additional thoughts or maybe you have a question that you want to tie to it and get your students responses.

Finally, what is trending? Regardless of what course that you're participating in, there are things that are trending. It's just a matter of going out and doing a search for that. Those are some ideas to get started. We're going to dive into this a little deeper and more specific in different parts of this. Before we finish up, there's some things that you probably don't want to be doing on Twitter, right? If you get your account up, I would stay away from complaining. You don't want to complain about your students, you don't want to complain about your job, you don't want to complain about your employer, all this will follow you and you don't want this information to follow you.

Same thing with when you put something out there, you may or may not get replies. It is just how it is that some people will engage in the discussion. Some people won't. It's just how it is that in fact, in a way you have a radio show and it's great if people want to come back but it's really just kind of your radio show. It's all done primarily in text. If people start sharing your posts, great. Send some appreciation but don't go overboard. Then also, don't be too cool as it was shared in these comments that some of this stuff will haunt you. The written word is really hard to share humor, to share some of these emotions so you just want to be careful that it's not going to come back to haunt you.

Would your mom be pleased with it? Stay off the six o'clock news, those type of things and just be attentive to it. Be a professional and participate in a professional manner. Finally, the thing that I want to share is don't stay on Twitter. Treat it like office hours. That you check in. Once a day, you catch up and do your tweets and then get off of it. Don't be on it the whole day. You have other things to do. Ideally, try to weave this in. I would definitely encourage you to get on Twitter. In the next episode, I'm going to talk a little bit more about setting this up for your professional learning network and how you can do that. Before I go, here's a little quick plug for the book.