

All a Twitter about Twitter Micro-Blogging as a Professional Networking Tool

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I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.
Attributed to Mark Twain

As educators we value learning and growth. We hope our students become life long learners as we ourselves continue to learn and develop our craft. We attend workshops, take classes and read books. Many schools are encouraging the creation of professional learning communities, where educators can work together to improve student learning and instructional strategies. These learning communities are a part of your network. We are learning all the time. Daniel R. Tobin demonstrates how a Professional Learning Network can aid in your learning

- By helping you to sift through all the data to identify the information that will be most useful to you.
- By helping you to identify learning resources and opportunities.
- By coaching you and answering your questions as you try to apply your learning to your work.
- By sharing their wisdom with you through dialogue.

Building a personal learning network requires that you not only seek to learn from others, but also that you help others in the network learn. Even when you are a novice in a field of learning, you can still make contributions (Tobin, 1998).

Your professional learning environment is made up of all the things which influence your learning and growth. With the advent of the Internet we are connected to even more information and opportunities to learn. It is an extremely beneficial exercise for educators to examine their professional connections once in a while. When you look over your professional networks do you find it contains the same people and sources of information? This would be a sign you need to expand your community, to diversify. It is important to have wide range of sources. Your professional learning environment can contain the following:

Reading and Listening

Books, Blogs, Periodicals (print or electronic), Podcast, etc.

Courses/Workshops and Trainings

Those you are teaching or taking, face-to-face, or online

Conferences

What sessions did you attend?

Were there any significant conversations or learning moments outside of a session?

Conversations and Correspondence

Conversations at work; the people you regularly meet with at lunch, department meetings
Correspondence; The people with whom you have regular communication; email, [Skype](#), [Twitter](#), [Plurk](#), and IM interactions (Second Life ® falls into this category)

Today's web can greatly influence the way we connect and collaborate. We can gather information from websites, blogs and wikis with RSS. [RSS](#) can help pull it all together in one place. We can participate in online learning using [Moodle](#), [Blackboard](#) and other course management systems. We can participate in various social networking sites such as [Ning](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), and [Plurk](#). We can chat with Educators world wide using Skype, or Instant Messaging. We can participate in Multi User Virtual Environments (MUVE) such as Second Life®. These tools can greatly influence our learning and growth. Our access to information knows no bounds. We truly are in control of, and responsible for, our own professional development and growth. So what's in your learning network?

Twitter and Plurk Two Networking Tools

Two of the more common tools to communicate and share among members of your learning network are Twitter and Plurk. The tools are similar, yet different. You may feel more comfortable with one. Some Educators keep a presence on both tools. It might be best if you give them each a trial run, before making a choice on what will work best for you.

Twitter (<http://twitter.com/>) is a free social networking tool that allows people to send updates called tweets. These updates are limited to 140 characters. Twitter can be compared to an IM (Instance message) service or micro-blogging. Tweets can be read and uploaded at the twitter website or with 3rd party desktop widgets. A list of desktop widgets can be found here, <http://twitter.pbwiki.com/Apps>.

Updates are displayed on your Twitter home page and instantly sent to others who follow your tweets. You can send messages to all of your followers, or send a private, direct message. Your account can be protected, meaning others must ask to follow you or it can be public allowing anyone to follow your updates. Twitter is not a useful tool *unless* you follow and are following others.

Below is some advice provided by Fred Delventhal. His original blog post can be found at: http://blog.discoveryeducation.com/fred_delventhal1/2008/03/30/in-the-beginning-advice-to-new-twits-people-on-twitter/

5 Tips and Advice to new Twits (people on Twitter)

I gave my first intro to Twitter to my colleagues the other day. I missed giving some very good advice that I might not have forgotten if I had a check list. So in a blog post for "don't do as I do" here are some tips for new people to Twitter.

- Fill in your bio section. If you are an educator make that clear. Many of us, myself included, won't follow someone if they don't have something to contribute to my personal learning network (PLN). *Please note that I follow some people outside of education because my PLN expands outside of education.
- Change your settings to "see all replies." This is important because if you tweet a question and someone that you don't follow answers your question, you won't see it. You want to see all replies in case you don't follow someone that may reply to your

tweets. If you get a tweet from someone that is helpful it is good karma to follow that person in return.

- Follow others! Choose a person in your network and look at who they are following. You can build your network by following those that can be the most use to you. DON'T FOLLOW EVERYONE UNLESS YOU WANT TO AND KNOW WHY YOU ARE DOING IT! Some people follow others to increase their numbers for marketability. When people reach into the thousands of people they follow very little info is used. They are just working on their numbers. Twitter is about learning and gaining useful info; not about noise.
- If Twitter is blocked, consider using one of the Instant Messaging systems to get tweets and also tweet from. Twitter supports the major IM services and also offers extra features using IM. One such thing is tracking keywords using IM. You can keep an eye out for people that use certain keywords in their tweets. I have added many people to my PLN by tracking the keyword "smartboard" through IM. Unfortunately this doesn't work for the web site or through applications like twiterrific or whirl. It does work with AIM and Google Talk.
- Your icon is your association. People do become familiar with your icon. Make sure you make it representative of yourself. I change my icon quite frequently. That's me and it says something about me. Others choose a representative picture and stay with that as how they want people to view them. Any way you look at it CHANGE YOUR ICON from the default brown square with circles.

Plurk (<http://www.plurk.com>) is another free social networking tool that allows people to send updates called plurks. Plurk defines itself as a social journal. Like Twitter, Plurk updates are limited to 140 characters. Unlike Twitter. Plurk's responses are linked to the original message which creates easy to follow conversations.

Updates are displayed on your Plurk time lines and sent to others who follow your updates. You can send messages to all of your friends and fans, or send a private message to an individual or cliques (group). Your Plurk account can be protected, meaning others must ask to be your friend or it can be public which allows anyone to follow your updates. Plurk, is not a useful tool *unless* you have friends and fans to communicate with. As with Twitter updating your profile will make it easier to connect with others.

Plurk allows users to follow discussions threads easier than with Twitter, as evident with this example <http://www.plurk.com/p/287np>

Plurk also has a little feature called karma. Karma is given to you as you use the site. As your karma increases so do some of the features available to you on the site. Some people focus on karma while others ignore it, not letting it influence their behavior. I am sure some physiologists would have a field day studying the effects of karma on user behaviors.

Plurk also allows the user to choose a verb to begin their post. These qualifiers are color-coded words. These verbs tend to force the user to write about themselves in the 3d person, it feels awkward at first but soon seems natural. You can also write a plurk without these verbs which is called freestyle plurking. You also have the ability to show a thumbnail of a video or image in your plurks. This allows the reader to view the image without ever leaving the time line, a handy little feature.

Edmodo A Classroom Alternative to Twitter and Plurk

<http://www.edmodo.com/>

Edmodo allows teachers to create private groups for students to share messages, links, and files. Assignments and calendar events can also be added. This is a great way for a class to coordinate information for an extended project or current events. The use of Edmodo in a classroom would be a good way to help students learn professional networking skills.

Resources

Additional Professional Learning Network Resources

Downes, Stephen (2007). *The Future of Online Learning and Personal Learning Environments*. Slideshare. Retrieved on September 16, 2007 from <http://www.slideshare.net/Downes/the-future-of-online-learning-and-personal-learning-environments>

Guhlin, Miguel (2005). Personal Learning Networks: Blogs as Webs of Connected Learning. Retrieved on September 16, 2007 from <http://www.edsupport.cc/mguhlin/artifacts/writings/2005/blogsplns.htm>

Jacobson, Michael J. & Levin, James A., (1993) Conceptual Frameworks for Network Learning Environments: Constructing Personal and Shared Knowledge Spaces. Retrieved on September 16, 2007 from http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/tta/papers/JL_EdTele/

Sienens, George (2003). *Learning Ecology, Communities, and Networks: Extending the Classroom*. elearnspace. Retrieved on September 16, 2007 from <http://www.edsupport.cc/mguhlin/artifacts/writings/2005/blogsplns.htm>

Tobin, Daniel R. (1998). *Building Your Personal Learning Network*. Corporate Learning Strategies. Retrieved on September 16, 2007 from <http://www.tobincls.com/learningnetwork.htm>

Additional Twitter Resources

Twitter for Newbies wiki <http://butwait.pbwiki.com/Twitter-Newbies-FAQ>

Twitter in Plain English a video by CommonCraft. <http://www.commoncraft.com/twitter>

Twhirl a desktop twitter client; <http://www.twhirl.org/>

Twitterific a desktop twitter client and also a tool for a mobile device
<http://iconfactory.com/software/twitterrific>

Additional Plurk Resources

Plurk Basics, a video tutorial by Liz Davis <http://blip.tv/file/1030933>

Plurk it, a desktop widget for plurk <http://www.twisterc.com/blog/2008/06/22/plurkit-on-adobe-air>

Plurk Air, a desktop widget for plurk <http://www.inquisitr.com/1230/plurkair-a-basic-open-source-desktop-client-for-plurk/>

Ping Fm, lets you send a post to multiple services such as twitter and plurk. <http://ping.fm/>

Plurk Mobile – lets you send plurk updates from your mobile phone or iTouch.
<http://www.plurk.com/m>.