

SoapBox: Sue Waters and friends Twitter

Sue Waters: Hi Knowledge Tree. This is Sue Waters, an aquaculture lecturer from Challenger TAFE in Western Australia and thanks for the opportunity of talking on your SoapBox. The amazing thing at the moment is there's so many free online tools that we can use now, that are changing how we are learning as educators and these tools are also empowering how our students are learning, and one of the most amazing tools at the moment that I am seeing being used by educators is Twitter which is like this crazy micro-blogging tool.

The question is 'What are you doing?' So you type 140 characters and then you have people that follow you and get notification of what you've written, and you have people that you follow and you get notification of what they've written. So for example I have over 100 people all around the world that I follow and I listen to what they are saying and they will tell me about wonderful and weird and amazing things that they are doing in their life that I should be checking out and I tell them things that they should be checking out.

But it is really hard to explain, so I have asked some of my friends from my Twitter network to tell you more about how Twitter has changed their lives. And to start with here is Alan Levine from the New Media Consortium.

Alan Levine: Kind of my first forays with Twitter and like many people when I first heard about it and saw it and thought "That is really the stupidest thing I ever heard about. Why would anybody do that?" And it's easy and you see a lot of people do that to make those judgements from the outside without being there with the technology. There is a confusion we make as well at confusing the capability and potential of a technology with actually the content that is being produced on it. So yeah a lot of people do silly inane things on there, but when you look at the communication aspects of it, it's ability to interface with the Web, with your mobile phone and kind of having this almost near real time connectivity, to be open to the possibilities about what this stuff can do and give up this notion that we can quote unquote be the 'experts' in this stuff, and we can't. We need a network of experts.

Graeme Wegner: Hi. I'm Graeme Wegner. I am an ICT coordinator in a primary school in Adelaide, SA and I am going to have a quick couple of words about how Twitter has impacted on me. I think that Twitter is a really useful tool because it is great for being able to help people out, or to get some quick instant help yourself. One example is a teacher in Bangkok Kim Cofino. One day she just put on Twitter that she was holding a PD session for all of her parents on the power of Web 2.0 and she thought the best way would be to see whether she could get educators world wide to pop into her session. Just by putting it up on Twitter she had a dozen or so people and I was able to sit there for 15 minutes during my lunch time and participate in a bit of a chat coupled with her presentation and field a few questions from her parents. So that is a really great way of leveraging people on your Twitter network just by a posting saying "This is what I need. Can you help?" and quite often people jump in and help and in the reverse way I have actually gained help the other way.

I have been doing a global project with our upper primary classrooms. I needed one more classroom for a teacher at my school and had advertised on Ning but I got contact through a person called Robyn Ellis on the Twitter network, who said "Yes, I'm interested, we could talk further" and so by just saying what I wanted on Twitter, within five or six minutes I got a response from someone who was keen. While I had advertised even on a site like Ning it had taken me several days and if I put it on my blog it actually took about a week to get responses, so it is an instant way of getting help or offering help. I think that is one of the really big benefits of the tool.

SoapBox: Sue Waters and friends Twitter

Michael Coghlan: Michael Coghlan here, talking about Twitter and what impact it has had on my personal learning. There is a lot to like about Twitter. Despite my initial resistance, I found I looked forward to spending time there every day. The curious thing is that it gives you connection with people you have met in other spaces, perhaps email lists or discussion forums, but the nature of communication on Twitter, it being much more bite-sized, perhaps reflecting a desire in modern life to get the information in smaller chunks, means that you can more quickly pay attention to the links that people might pass on to you so as a result of spending a little bit of time each day on Twitter, I have made new connections with people I have known elsewhere, I have got new information, new knowledge by reading blogs I wouldn't otherwise go to, I have ready articles I wouldn't have otherwise found, I have taken part in new discussions and I know about other events that are taking place.

It is the immediacy, it is the personal connection and the fact that you don't have to spend a lot of time reading the posts, that is part of Twitter's appeal.

Kristin Hokanson: My name is Kristin Hokanson and I am a technology integration mentor in South Eastern Pennsylvania. Twitter has been an invaluable tool for me as I support the teachers in my school with emerging technologies. I find that Twitter provides immediate responses for me. Questions arise about tools or strategies on which I am working. In the past I have had to try to figure out these issues on my own and when I am unable to work out a solution, I perhaps turn to my listservs and I found that by the time I got a solution, it was either too late or there may be no one in the network that could help me. With Twitter I have found myself in Chicago, Bangkok, Australia and a variety of places round the world to learn with experts within my network – incredible new tools.

Simon Brown: My name is Simon Brown, and Sue has asked me to tell how Twitter has become important to me. I teach stonemasonry trade skills in Brisbane. It's a trade that's very much associated with tradition in many ways, but there's been a lot of change recently in expectations about trade skills training. Employers want their apprentices to spend less time away from the workplace attending TAFE classes, but they still expect high standards of competency. So when time is limited, and students are spread geographically, good communication tools are really necessary to help keep everyone on track. Twitter is something I'd like to use with my students to do this, but I haven't quite worked out how. In the meantime, it's all about my own learning.

I try to keep up with new and emerging technologies that I can apply to my teaching practice. I reckon my students deserve the best that I can give them. Unfortunately, resources are limited, and that means learning is mostly outside work time, and I get to use free tools. I joined Twitter earlier this year after I read about it in somebody's 'Cool Tools' listing somewhere online. My first post won me a new friend, someone I'd never met, who was telling the world about his world in 140 characters. Soon, I'd connected with a network of Twitterers sharing their latest news. I'd never learned so much so quickly than before I followed my new friends, sharing achievements, frustrations, jokes and personal moments in a stream of one-liners.

With apologies to Shakespeare, brevity is the soul of Twit.

Useful links

[A Guide to Twitter in Libraries](#)

[7 things you should know about Twitter \(from EDUCAUSE\)](#)