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Pedagogical Applications of Twitter



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The Issue

In 2009, a [report](#) described blogs as a website maintained by one or several bloggers who freely post writings in a logbook (or web log) in reverse chronological order. Bloggers use a platform that allows them to easily enrich their posts with hyperlinks and media. Readers can leave comments and the blog can become a place for discussion or debate.

The microblog is a more recent development. It is akin to the blog on many levels, but among the differences, posts must contain fewer than 140 characters.

In 2007 the little bird launched its first tweets, enabling microblogging to win thousands of fans. It is hard to establish the exact number of microbloggers: in 2010, there were 25 million according to the CEFRIO and 105 million according to the Huffington Post.

The most widely known microblogging tool is the [Twitter](#) site. But what is Twitter? In an [article](#) published in 2009, Bruno Guglielminetti stated that Twitter enables communication and that "increasingly, it is starting to become a tool for broadcasting and promotion."

Description of the tool

The microblog is a powerful tool that brings together the functionalities of Web 2.03. It enables communication with other sites (including Facebook), is user-friendly and available online.

There is no doubt about the growing use of Twitter: between February 2008 and February 2009, the number of Twitter users rose by 1,382%. But what about Québec? In 2010, the CEFRIO studied the issue and published a report stating that use was still marginal in Québec. Indeed, ten percent of Internet users posted comments on a microblogging platform. According to the CEFRIO, 26% of Internet users from 18 to 24 years of age use microblogging.

Definition

Twitter is a microblogging tool for sharing thoughts, comments, links or other things in no more than 140 characters. You have to have an account on Twitter so you can follow other accounts to get into the action. This means that you do not own a microblog the way you own a blog.

The site gives you the opportunity to create a network of interests and to access the posts of individuals, organizations or companies that have Twitter accounts to share information and promote their products and services.

A vocabulary of keywords specific to the tool has developed. To be comfortable on Twitter and to derive maximum benefits, here are a few terms to get to know:

Tweet

Content posted. A tweet has characteristics such as the author, the time it was sent, and the tool used to send it. It basically contains text, links to sites, documents, images, videos and if wish, your geolocation.

Tweeter

The author of a tweet.

RT

This is a code used to repost a tweet you thought was interesting in your own network. Following the keyword RT, you enter the user name of the author of the tweet.

@name

When you address a user in particular, or when you want to mention a tweeter in a tweet, you enter an @ followed by the user name. A link to the page of this user is automatically available for everyone consulting the tweet.

Hashtag

Including a number sign followed by a keyword (e.g. #aqpc), a hashtag that identifies a tweet. A link is automatically created and allows a search of all the tweets identified by the same hashtag. For example, during events, participants can use a hashtag thereby making available all tweets.

Direct messaging

While most discussion is public, two users can communicate privately by using this functionality. This is internal messaging and works in a similar way to an e-mail system, but the content of messages must be less than 140 characters.

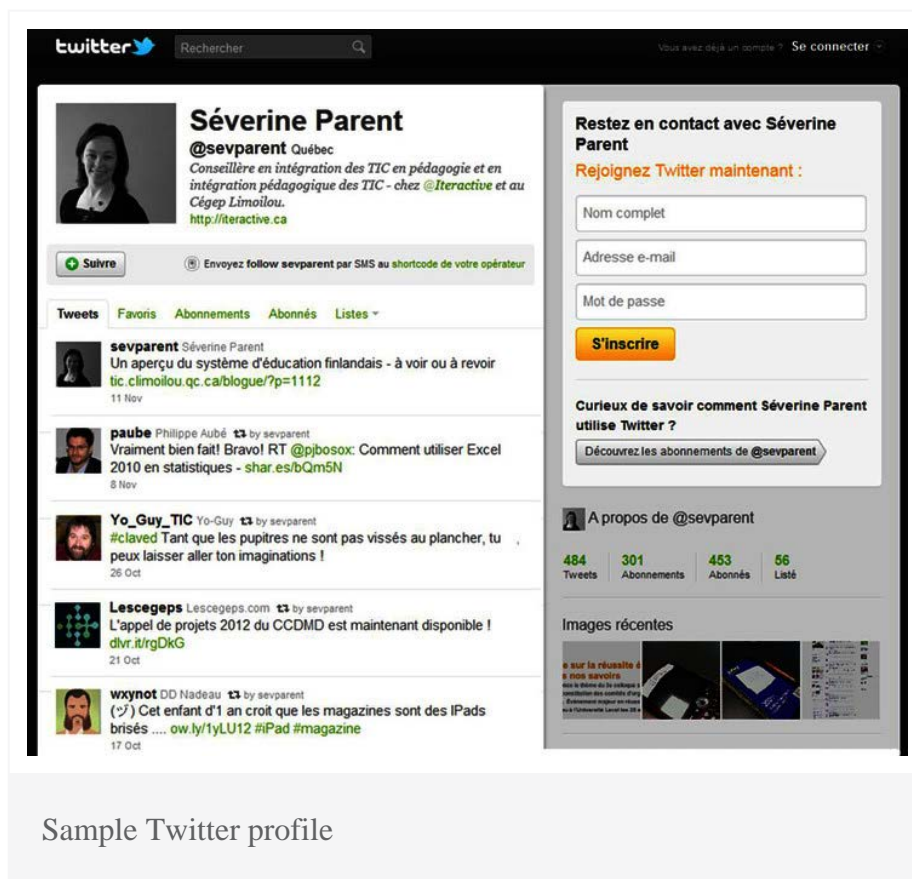


Here is a sample tweet

There are two main interfaces on Twitter: the profile and the home page.

A sample profile

The profile is what other people who consult your homepage see, whether or not they are Twitter subscribers (unless you have protected your profile).



Sample Twitter profile

Tweet

Content that you have posted or reposted.

Favorites

The tweets you have identified as favorites (available to you and the public).

Following

List of users that you follow (their tweets are displayed when you sign in). Following is not necessarily reciprocal: a tweeter can follow the content posted by another tweeter while the reverse may not occur.

Followers

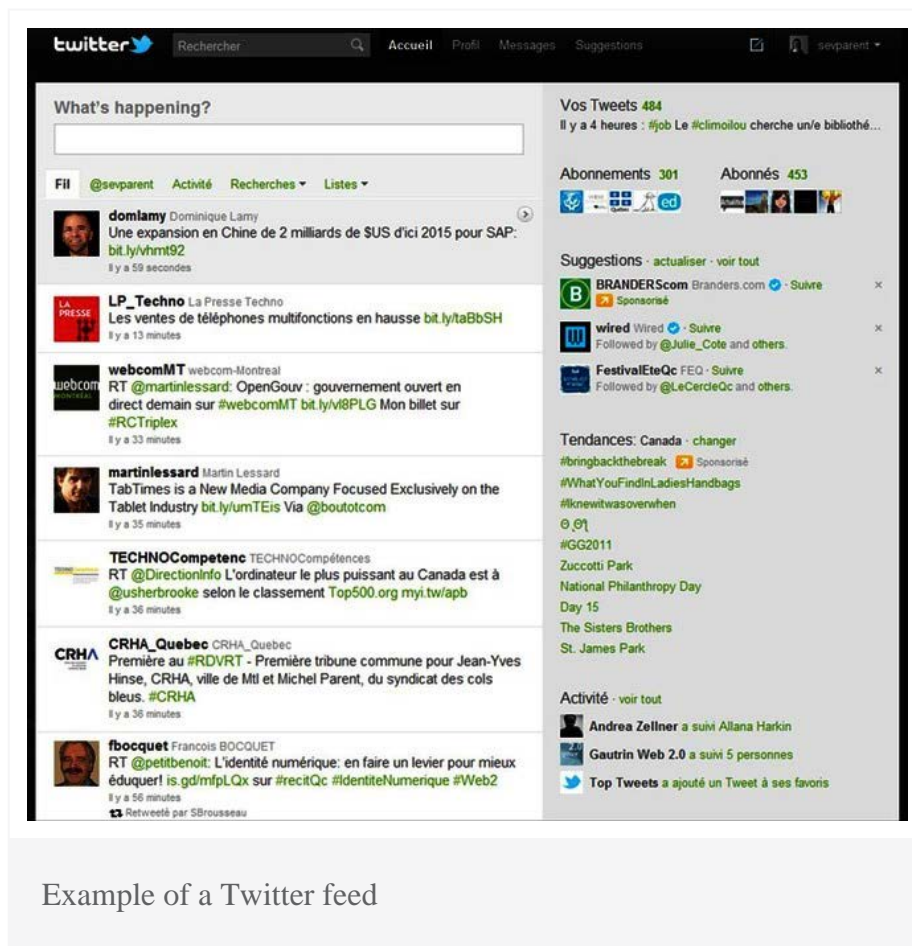
List of users who follow you. Followers have access to the tweets that you post to their home page.

Lists

You can use lists to manage your following. They allow you to group tweeters based on your criteria and to only consult their tweets.

Home page

The content posted by the people that you follow appears on the home page.



Timeline

Content posted by the people you follow.

Tweets

When a tweeter writes an @ followed by your user name (to address you or to mention you in a tweet), the tweet is listed in the tweets section and you receive an e-mail notification.

Activity

This is a summary of the activities of the tweeters that you follow. It contains their recent following activity, the tweets they retweeted and the tweets they have marked as favorites.

Searches

These are the searches that you have saved to quickly access to tweets on a subject or on an event.

Lists

These are the same lists as in the profile.

Different applications in connection with Twitter

Some tools have been developed to interact with Twitter in environments different from the one on the official site. The designers of these applications have added functionalities to facilitate the reading or posting of tweets.

Tools to complement Twitter are constantly being developed. Since this is an introduction to the tool, we recommend that you read the article on Online Best Colleges.com to consult a list of 100 Twitter tools to help you achieve your goals.

Techno-pedagogical features

In addition to the technological characteristics (including ease of posting and asynchronous consultation) pedagogical features (metacognition and the opportunity for interactions) of [blogs](#), the use of microblogs in a pedagogical context allows the following techno-pedagogical features:

Provide access to a community	Teachers can post and gather information concerning their field of specialization. Many companies and organizations have Twitter accounts to share information concerning their industry. It is therefore an excellent monitoring tool that also provides students with an opportunity to create a network in their field of study.
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Participate in events



Exemple d'un événement sur Twitter (mot-clic #claved)

Supporting cooperative learning

Twitter makes it possible to submit questions to a network of specialists, submit ideas and develop them according to interactions with other tweeters. Students can use Twitter to document their searches and get feedback on the tweets they post.

It should be noted that Twitter can be used in the classroom even when not all students have access to a computer. It is easy to consult the site and contribute using a mobile device.

Practical Applications

Integrating the tool into your professional practice

You can familiarize yourself with microblogging by starting to use it as a monitoring tool in your field. You can log on to [Twitter](#) and do a search in order to see whether people or organizations in your field are active on Twitter. You can consult Twitter accounts while not connected, but to derive full benefit from Twitter's potential, you should preferably create an account. To create an account:

- Go to [Twitter](#), indicate your full name, your e-mail address and choose a password.
- Choose your user name, preferably a short name (remember the 140-character limit). This name will

identify you and will be public.

- Find accounts to follow. Twitter suggests the most popular accounts in Québec. It lets you search by subject and even allows you to search users among your contacts

You can choose among the suggestions. You can always unsubscribe from accounts that you have chosen and you can subscribe to other accounts later. Follow organizations or experts in your field or the field of education. Consult their following list: you will no doubt find other relevant users to follow.

The information that you find on Twitter can potentially enrich your classes. You can post the address of your profile to your students and even invite them to register and follow your account. Some studies indicate, moreover, that posting content on line increases student motivation.

A process to use with your students

After you have become comfortable with the tool and you have found an advantage in having your students use it, here is a process to inspire you:

- In the classroom, to make use of the tool, students must:
 - Open an account (make sure all the students have an e-mail address)
 - Ask the students to add a photo, fill in their profile and clearly indicate their interests. In a pedagogical context, it is useful to indicate in the profile that this is a student account and that it is being used as part of a learning process.
 - Suggest that students take a guided tour of the main functionalities
 - Suggest a following (list of users to follow)
 - As the students to find other users and share them with others
- The teacher could then:
 - Follow the students' accounts
 - Give some examples of the type of expected assignments
 - Define a short hashtag that will identify the assignments. The teacher will thus be able to consult the tweets produced by the students as part of the proposed activity.
- Depending on the type of activity chosen, the teacher will be able to determine times for posting and the type of content expected. The students will then be able to:
 - Produce original synthesized tweets (in or outside the classroom)
 - Repost tweets considered relevant to the context

- Post links to sites of interest
- Attach images as required
- The teacher will then be able to read, repost and respond to the students' tweets
- Lastly, in the classroom, the teacher will be able to:
 - Review the most relevant information
 - Make adjustments as required
 - Propose topics and areas of discussion for the following week

Examples of integration in the classroom

The use of microblogs is relatively recent. In education, initiatives are taking place at all levels, as the use of microblogs is only just beginning.

French teacher Laurence Juin has helped spread the word about Twitter and its usefulness for teaching. She has a [professional account](#) and a personal account. For more information about her experience, consult her [blog](#).

In Québec, Jean-Yves Fréchette introduced nanoliterature. He published a [story](#) in French on this topic last December. This retired literature teacher talked about the *Institut de twittérature comparée* in several forums, as shown in this [report](#).

The site of the Institut de twittérature comparée proposes "[genres twittéraires](#)" that could have a role in an instructional project on Twitter; long or short (the [novel](#), the [twiller](#)) narrative (a story in a tweet, a story in a tweet with a twist, called *atwister*), citation, twaiku (haikus). One or several authors can compose these tweets. Collective writing may take the form of an ABC or [exquisite corpse](#). Lastly, these assignments may be subject to constraints: respecting the 140 character limit, following a specific genre or excluding a letter.

Here are some suggestions for use: a number of these examples have been tested in colleges.

Teaching with Twitter

Maggy Richmond-Mhairig, a teacher at Collège LaSalle, had her students try out the 140-character experiment. On introducing her students to Twitter, she gave them access to her own network and to the resources she considered interesting as a supplement to the course (links to blog articles, events, videos, etc.).

As she indicates in her [story](#), the fashion design teacher integrated projects with a marketing dimension, such as the organization of benefit galas into her classes. After having initiated students to microblogging in the classroom during sessions displayed on screen, she asked students to moderate a Twitter account in order to promote their event.

Debating and Building Arguments

Using Twitter during an event can be encouraged by the organizers, or it can emerge from a group of participants. This is a phenomenon commonly known as *backchannelling*. A keyword is then chosen, allowing identification of tweets concerning the event. *Backchannelling* is informal electronic communication that occurs when tweeters express themselves in public. In some cases, organizers choose to display *backchannelling* on a large screen, allowing those who take the floor to interact with the comments made. *Backchannelling* is an added value at a presentation for people in attendance, and it allows people who are not on site to participate, or at least to follow the activities or to have access to conference content.

In education, this practice can be used to facilitate active participation during the screening of a film in the classroom. At agreed upon times, students are asked to comment on or discuss what they are viewing.

A Secondary V French teacher, Jean Doré, has tested Twitter in the classroom. He used microblogging to ask students to take a position during and after watching the film *Douze hommes en colère*.

The students had to give their opinions on Twitter at the same time the jury had to vote in the film. The students had to write "guilty" or "not guilty" and back up their position with an argument on a sheet of paper. This stage was first done individually, then, ten minutes before the end of the film; students posted their arguments on Twitter by adding the hashtag provided by the teacher.

The hashtag used (#12hommes) allowed quick access to all the students' arguments. The feedback accessible via Twitter made it possible, after the screening, to review the posted opinions in the classroom.

Cooperative Writing

In this type of activity, the tweeters agree on the use of a hashtag and on the posting rules for tweets. For example, tweeters wrote a novel together that did not contain the letter e. They chose a hashtag (#romanSansE) and had to consider previously posted tweets before adding their own contribution.

All of the posts were then collated into six chapters to which illustrations were added. The result is available at the [blog](#) of the project's [instigator](#).



Example of a tweet using the hashtag #romanSansE

Nanoliterature is not exclusive to Twitter, it is also found on Facebook, for example, 3 Word Story. Other themes that can be used are listed on eclectico.effetdesurprise.qc.ca.

Posting a Weekly Tweet

Annie Côté, a French teacher at École secondaire Saint-Pierre et des Sentiers, proposed an eight-week project to her students during which they had to post a tweet per week and keep to a theme (paying tribute to a person or a thing, a false quotation, presenting a news item, etc.). The goal of the activity was to practise “concision, precision, synonyms and style.” In an interview, the teacher mentions that the ideal length of such a project would likely be from four to six weeks, a project that would fit in with a college calendar.

You can listen to an interview with Annie Côté on the show [L'encre des jours](#) and follow Annie Côté on her professional [Twitter](#) (both in French) account.

Historic Tweets

In 2009, [Monica Rankin](#), a professor of history at the University of Dallas, used Twitter in the classroom to provide a voice to every one of her 90 students who had access to a laptop or a telephone. All interventions were identified by a hashtag (#h1302w14) to allow everyone to find their way. The professor's assistant maintained the [course account](#), and her presence in the classroom enabled everyone to participate.

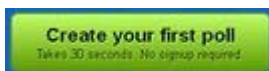
In this case, students expressed their opinions on the topic provided. In another context, history students could be asked to produce tweets while putting themselves in the shoes of a character. They could even create and operate the account of a historical character (known or unknown), taking into consideration what they know about the character based on the era concerned and their location.

Using Polls

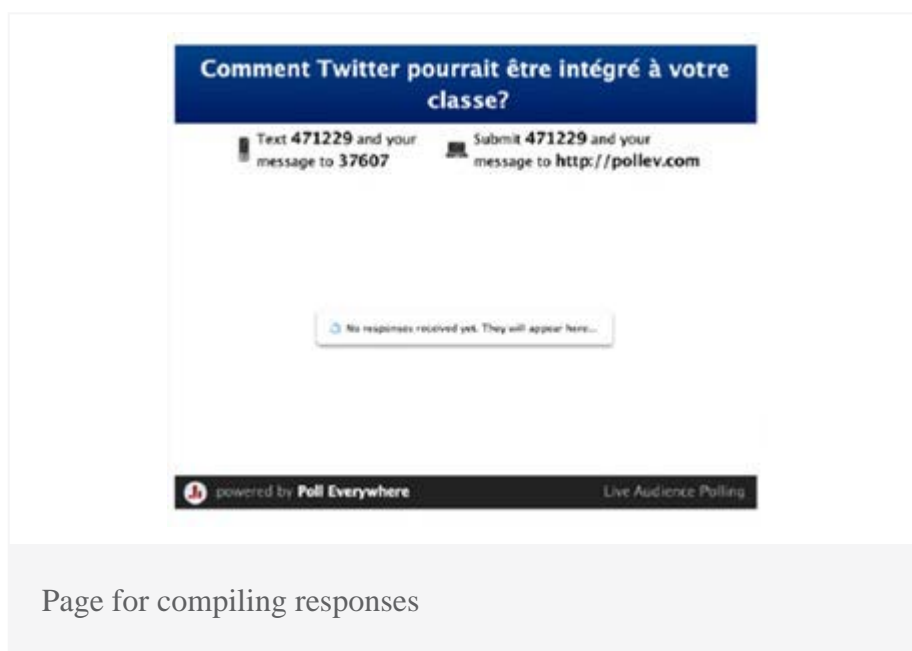
There are many tools that integrate with Twitter offering a variety of features. This is the case for [Poll Everywhere](#), a tool that makes it possible to quickly get audience feedback by creating polls and having participants vote.

To create a poll that students can respond to via Twitter (as well as by texting or directly on the Internet), go to <http://www.polleverywhere.com>

Click on the button to create your poll.



Once the poll is created, you will get a page for compiling responses.



PollEveryWhere will give you the codes to identify the responses so that they will be compiled.

- To respond on the Web, you must go to the address <http://www.polleverywhere.com/vote>, identify it with the poll number (here 471229) and type the answer
- To respond via Twitter, all you need do is start the tweet by @poll, followed by the identification number, then your answer.
- To respond by texting, you have to send the message to the number indicated, specify the poll number and enter the answer.



The responses received will be compiled on the poll page.

When using the tool for free, the number of compiled responses is limited to 40. The poll page is no longer available after two weeks of inactivity.



In this way, teachers can use the results of a given poll to orient the themes dealt with during classroom sessions. In labs equipped with computers, teachers could use this functionality in the same way clickers are used.

Limitations and Challenges

Despite the fact that Twitter offers numerous possibilities, it also has limitations. The tool's characteristic feature, the 140-character limit, necessitates concision to summarize thoughts. Some reflections and posts could require more than 140 characters to encompass the content and the context. Also, it is sometimes difficult to know whether the author is presenting the results of his own reflection or that of someone else, particularly when the content is shared over a period of time in which several people have had the opportunity to express themselves.

It is a challenge for the teacher to follow his students' posts on Twitter. He will have to facilitate and stimulate the discussion, answer questions and make adjustments as required.

Evaluation

Evaluation using Web 2.0 tools necessitates managing, subject material in addition to the features of Web 2.0 tools.

Since the subject area is linked to the content dealt with in your course, here, we merely indicate guidelines that will enable you to evaluate the characteristics of assignments performed with the microblogging tool. These rules should help you make sure the tweets are appropriately constructed. Make sure your students are aware of these requirements and use them to facilitate the evaluation of microblog posts:

- Identify tweets with a hashtag
- Express one idea per tweet

- Identify tweets clearly to attribute ownership of the idea to the user who first mentioned it
- Ensure tweets are understandable outside the context, which makes them accessible to those who were not present during composition and extends their lifespan

Here are a few characteristics of good tweeters:

- They have completed their profile and added an image.
- They post at least once a week
- They do not post intrusively
- They make appropriate use of RT when necessary
- They make appropriate use of @ and private texting when necessary.

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