

Using Twitter in EFL Education

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*For those who have been less tuned-in to Internet developments, Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) is the much-hyped phenomenon that is becoming increasingly widespread on blogs and websites all over cyberspace. It is represented by a little blue bird, which beckons viewers to “follow” site owners by clicking on it. Twitter users need not have a regular blog or website to use it, though; it can be used as a stand-alone communication system. This paper will give an overview of the main advantages of using Twitter for **EFL**, give some guidelines for teachers and students for getting started, and offer a list of activities for which Twitter can be used. Less pedagogical uses will also be outlined, as well as the broader, positive implications of using this microblogging application.*

Introduction

Popular with mobile phone users, Twitter is a microblogging system that limits users to posts of no more than 140 characters, which translates into one or at most three sentences. This forces users to be as concise as possible, which is part of the appeal of the system. The rest of the attraction lies in its real-time content that encourages people to befriend each other and interact with each other to a much higher degree than previous **SNS** (Social Networking System) models.

Twitter users keep track of other users by clicking the “follow” button on the latter’s profile page. When individual users are followed, their updates are put together in a “feed” that their followers can easily peruse. These feeds are updated in real time, right in front of the user. Because the posts are so short, people can easily blog about things

as they are happening. This is already changing the face of journalism, as information can be spread in real time.

Posting on Twitter is unintimidating, and posts are enjoyable to read. As Twitter prompts people to post by asking the question: "What are you doing?" critics have asserted that mundane, day-to-day postings such as "I'm eating breakfast now" would soon wear off in novelty. (Twitter has since changed the prompt to the more appropriate, "What's happening?") However, that did not happen. Many failed to anticipate how interesting others' daily details could be, and moreover, how many other uses of Twitter would evolve.

Breaking news has been mentioned, but huge organizations like Monster.com, an employment organization, use Twitter now to post job openings; companies use it extensively to inform or to create a viral buzz about their products or services; groups and individuals use it to inform, raise funds, and raise awareness of social issues; educators use it as an education tool (as shall be demonstrated below). Software from other companies and individuals designed specifically to work in tandem with Twitter has popped up in huge quantities, allowing for faster, more effective, and more enjoyable use of the platform. Of course, in defense of the naysayers, only 5% of Twitter users account for 75% of all activity on the system, and less than half are really active at all (Cheng and Evans, 2009). Regardless, Twitter does have some interesting potential for **EFL** education.

From the start, Twitter has had a relatively strong Japanese user base, and this prompted founders Williams and Stone to create a Japanese-friendly interface in spring, 2008, and as of October, 2009, Twitter has been available for most mobile phone users in Japan. Cell phone access to twitter in the Japanese context expands practicality for Twitter use in **EFL** high schools and universities tremendously, seeing as local youth have such intimate relationships with their cell phones.

This paper will give an overview of the main advantages of using Twitter for **EFL**, give some guidelines for teachers and students for getting started, and offer a list of activities for which Twitter can be used. Less pedagogical uses will also be outlined, as well as the broader, positive implications of using this microblogging application. Before moving on, it should be said that Twitter has its own jargon: A "tweet" is a message or post, and "twitter" is the verb form for writing a message. The "Twittisphere" is that area of cyberspace where people twitter.

Main advantages of using Twitter

"The power of Twitter in the classroom lies in harnessing the instantaneous and ephemeral nature of the tool" (Kuropatwa, 2007). As more concisely outlined by Nick Campbell (2009), Twitter use in education has the following four main advantages, most obviously for teachers:

1) **Communicating class content:** One advantage of Twitter is that teachers can use the platform to send reminders to students about assignments, tests, etc. Twitter sends a text message when a person they follow updates. Some mobile devices like the iPhone are really capable of harnessing the power of Twitter; there are a variety of downloadable Twitter "clients" to make the experience as good as that of a PC. Users can set such a Twitter client to alert them when there is an update. This ensures messages get to them without necessarily keeping an email contact list or having to individually remind each student. Everyone who follows the teacher will get his/her message. However, if privacy is desired, but sending

what is called a direct message to individuals one at a time is undesirable, teachers will need to send messages to a class account they previously set up, since only members of this account will be able to read it (explained later).

2) Sending out small, timely pieces of information: Twitter is an excellent tool for teachers to send out small bytes of information as they are found, without having to go through the trouble of uploading to a class website or blog, or filling up students' email inboxes with content they might easily erase, forget about, or not even bother to check. Teachers can post links to news stories, relevant websites, or even the Twitter profiles of important people. Using **URL**-shortening services like *TinyURL* (<http://tinyurl.com>), *Doiop* (<http://doiop.com>), *Bit.ly* (<http://bit.ly>), etc. will help teachers post links to movies, articles, photos, etc. without taking up much of the 140-character limit. Of course, this applies to students as well.

3) Encouraging collaboration and feedback: Twitter is a great tool for teachers to encourage collaboration and peer feedback among students. They can post a link or a question for students to respond to together using Twitter's system of responding to a single person (@replies). As users become more advanced, they can take advantage of Twitter's functions, like "hashtags," its system of grouping a group of tweets under the umbrella of a keyword. (Read further for an explanation of how these work.) Making use of these functions and the applications that enhance their usability will capitalize on the things learned in the **EFL** lesson and could entice students into trying to discover more on their own. For example, by searching for a particular hashtag, perhaps based on key concepts assigned to them from the teacher, students may be surprised by what comes up, and curiosity may lead them to continue clicking through and find unexpected, substantial, relevant, timely, and interesting content beyond the scope of their **EFL** course.

4) Encouraging concise writing: Twitter forces users to be concise and to get right to the point. This is an important language ability to cultivate, and assignments on Twitter give students the opportunity to work on this writing skill. Surprisingly, Twitter may actually be good for teaching grammar. Many who tweet often abbreviate and abuse grammar rules, developing a unique sort of twitter shorthand, making messages really difficult for the uninitiated to understand in the process. This likely happens with many **SNSs**, and one can easily argue that students may think language structure is unnecessary. However, much as jargon is apparent, rules, structure, and etiquette do exist on Twitter, and the good thing is because the system is often new to native speakers as well, there are online resources with guidelines on how to write in Twitter speak, a good start being the Twitter site itself.¹ Poor adherence to form could result in being ignored, or, in possibly being kicked out on some **SNSs**. Although there is no evidence to support it, platforms like Twitter may just prove to students how communication needs rules and structure in order to be effective. E.g. They may come to appreciate the importance of a comma or a period.

Preparation

To make any activity requiring the use of technology for learning a success, either in or out of the classroom, some preparation on the part of teachers is essential. Here are some pointers for would-be, Twitter-using teachers:

1) Find out what Twitter is: It is essential that teachers learn how Twitter works in detail before integrating it into the **EFL** classroom. There is a plethora of online guides, videos, and articles that provide an overview of Twitter for beginners. One of the best is the video supplied in the help section of the Twitter site, also available on YouTube.com. A great way to learn (and this also applies to students) is just to dive in and do it. It is worth noting that there are many different people on Twitter who post free **EFL** resources that can help teachers. Good examples include *Englishfeed* (<http://twitter.com/englishfeed>) and *ESL Time* (<http://twitter.com/esltime>).

The following are three ways to post tweets, and more commands can be found on Twitter's main help page:

a) Write right into the empty box at the top of your Twitter page. All of your followers will automatically get the tweet when you press the send button.

b) *@username + message*

This directs a post to another person, and the message will be saved in that person's "replies" tab. The message is not private; it is still viewable by anyone who cares to look. Pressing the "reply" icon to the right of a post results in use of this function as well.

Example:

@eejkaorit Hi Kaori! You did a great job on your presentation today!

c) *d username + message*

This sends a person a private message that goes to their mobile device (if they register that address) and saves in their web archive. Other Twitter users cannot see this tweet.

Example:

d eegnaotakeh Naotake, you are missing a lot of homework. I am worried that you might fail the course. Is everything OK?

2) Make a teacher account: Especially those teachers who already avidly twitter might consider setting up a separate account to use exclusively for interacting with students. Management is made even easier if teachers set their privacy settings on for this account. It is useful if the teachers make a statement of the teacher account's purpose on their profile page in order to discourage unrelated followers. It is also a good idea for teachers to make their accounts private only after all desired students are following them. (Setting privacy to "on" basically means users have to respond to "follow" requests via email one by one, which can be troublesome at the beginning of term.)

3) Set up a class account: Setting up an account for the class itself is also a good idea, although not so much in itself. By subsequently registering the class account with a third part service such as *Group Tweet* (<http://grouptweet.com>) or *Tweet Party* (<http://tweetparty.com>), followers of the class account can send one direct message to the account and all members receive the message, knowing it is specifically for them. If this class account has its privacy settings set to "on" (after all class members have started following and are being followed by the group account, for reasons stated above), a direct tweet can *only* be read by group members. A teacher can therefore create not only a network that is easy to manage, but also a means of one-to-group communication that the rest of the Twittisphere cannot access. With a class account, the necessity for students to all be following and followed

by each other to easily read each other's content is no longer necessarily a requirement, although students will likely find that following each other individually is a great and fun way to interact. Finally, this method allows administrator(s) to view all the action of the group by accessing that class account, which also comes in very handy: Teachers who want to get a big picture of all student activity at once will not need to access individual student Twitter profiles or sift through their own Twitter home page activity.

4) Provide easily accessible self-study materials for students to learn Twitter: Twitter is actually fairly intuitive and easy to learn, but beginners should still explore the basics. Rather than using valuable class time to teach how to use Twitter (unless the class has few students and is conducted in a computer lab), setting up a list of links to resources, videos, and pre-made content about Twitter on a class blog or website is very useful. Having L1 information available might be appropriate if available. Students could go through this material as a first-day assignment, and/or complete an introductory Twitter activity.

Advice for signing up

When having students sign up for Twitter, it is helpful to give them the following guidelines:

1) Encourage students to use a recognizable name and picture, and follow a few rules: Twitter is a very public platform so teachers cannot force students to use their real names and personal photos for avatars (profile portraits). Being easily able to recognize individuals does make communication easier for everyone, especially for teachers managing multiple classes on Twitter. One idea is to have student register using a semi-coded name, such as the class code + first name + last name initial. They could also register using a role number or some assigned number, or teachers could assign them a different name. Although teachers should tell students they have privacy choice, they can remind students of the purpose of the platform and its future role in the course. Students could also be reminded that they can delete their profiles or change their twitter IDs and avatar after the course is completed.

Ideally, students should not make their accounts "private" for the term of their course, which means that strangers cannot read any of their would-be public posts; part of the enjoyment of Twitter will be when/if students acquire their own following of strangers who are interested in what they have to say. Additionally, students should be encouraged to accept followers, use English only, and avoid making a lot of direct tweets (which are only readable by the receiver). Finally, students can be encouraged to personalize the look and feel of their profile page by changing the background and color scheme. Third party site "Twitter Backgrounds" (<http://www.twitrbackgrounds.com>) offers a plethora of personalization options.

2) Alert students to the possibility of spam: The openness of Twitter is of course a double-edged sword. The more they follow and get followed, the wider their horizons become, but also the greater the possibility of encountering unwelcome followers. Porn-related followers can easily be recognized by the following: a) the user only has few tweets, sometimes with offensive language, b) the user has a suggestive profile picture and/or profile background image, c) the user has few followers but follows many. (In contrast, influential leaders have far more followers than they follow.) Teachers who are very concerned with

or offended by this reality should consider using more private microblogging options such as *Edmodo* (<http://edmodo.com>).

Twitter activities

Twitter is a great class management tool, but what kinds of **EFL** activities can be initiated through the platform? The following list demonstrates how effective Twitter can be in language acquisition.

Twitter initiation activities

Barbara Nixon (2008) wrote up the first assignment she gave students to initiate them into Twitter on her blog. She gave her students a time limit of 48 hours to sign up, follow appropriate accounts (the teacher and other class members in this case), and then send at least six tweets concerning anything they wish, such as questions, what they are doing, have done, or have read or seen. She also had them reply to at least two tweets from other members, outlining instructions on how to do this. Finally, after the 48 hours were up, she had her students blog a small report about the experience. This is a simple and effective assignment for breaking students into the Twittisphere. Nixon also advised her students to read an article about Twitter she had prepared on her blog. Other activities to get students started could include paraphrasing or summarizing Twitter “how-to” material, creating questions to ask each other about Twitter and making a game of it in class, or getting them to brainstorm ways in which they predict the platform will be useful.

Composition activities

Using twitter as a writing practice platform is perhaps one of the more obvious uses of Twitter:

a) Short stories. Creative writer Arjun Basu from Montreal (see <http://twitter.com/arjunbasu>) has mastered the art of writing short stories in under 140 characters, and has even had a book published. A similar writer is Sean Hill (<http://twitter.com/veryshortstories>). Such a writing project – either several micro-stories or a story in many parts – makes for a great **EFL** writing assignment. After following writers of short stories for some time or visiting and reading the creators’ pages, students can be given a theme and made to tweet their own stories. Students are afforded the chance to practice spelling, grammar, and sentence structure, and are likely to be more careful about their writing if they know the whole world can see. The word limit forces writers to be concise and selective. 140 characters is a very short space to squish in character development with some sort of plot and climax, yet the writers mentioned above somehow pull it off. In a composition class, reading examples from such authors might even help make literary concepts accessible.

b) Collaborative stories. That great game where one person starts a story, the next person continues it, etc. works very well on Twitter, and like the above is a great way for **EFL** students to work on their writing. Students can collaborate to write a complete story, in groups large or small, over several days or over several months. Different students can be in charge of monitoring whose turn it is (making sure the student does not sit on the

previous phrase for more than a certain amount of time), keeping track of what has been said so far, reminding writers when they should be in the story, etc. Beginning each post with “Post #” helps to track the story. At the end of the story, students can work in teams to correct any English errors in their masterpiece, and perhaps have it posted on the class site. There is actually a site called *Twittories* (<http://twittories.wikispaces.com/>) in which people participate in open stories – 140 tweets of 140 characters or less, in which students can be encouraged to participate.²

c) Poetry. Haiku or Tanka (short poems with limited syllables and strict forms), also make for creative writing assignments, lending themselves well to the Twitter platform because of their length. John Hicks is an example of someone who writes Haiku in his posts on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/blueheron>, and Dirk Johnston prefers Tanka: <http://twitter.com/dirkjohnson>. Teachers could have students follow one or two such people, choose a favorite poem, and explain their choice to classmates. The teacher can twitter a theme out to the class, and students have to come up with their own poem within a deadline. Students can use Twitter or a Twitter polling application to vote on the best ones.

Vocabulary activities

a) Sentence making with new words. Students can build English vocabulary posting a new word (chosen themselves or assigned) with an example sentence (either their own or one from a dictionary) each day, class, week, etc. If there is room on the post, they can post the definition of the word, synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms as well. This can be done daily or weekly, and the teacher (or students) could create a vocabulary quiz based on everyone’s posts. Students can also respond to the word with their own posts of example sentences, ideally their own examples.

b) Tracking words to learn usage. Twitter has a function called “tracking” which allows users to search a word in usages. Users in essence subscribe to any post that contains the word being tracked. Tracking a word brings up a variety of different ways in which a particular word is used. After some research, students can report their findings as an assignment, preferably on Twitter so that they can share with classmates. To track, people have to post a message to Twitter that says, “Track word” as opposed to simply posting the update, “Track word,” where “word” is the word or phrase people want to track.

Listening activities

At the same time as educators yearn for more ways to use Twitter with students, developers fortunately seem to be either a few steps in front or behind, trying to create applications and sites that will extend Twitter’s functionality and increase its usefulness and usability. One such site that brings in the audio-visual component is Chitter.TV (<http://chitter.tv>). This is a Twitter application that allows users to investigate a range of live TV channels from a variety of sources, see Twitter posts on what people are saying about them, and twitter their own comments. Nik Peachy (2010) concisely outlines his ideas for using this service in predominantly listening-based tasks below:

Here’s how you could use Chitter.TV with your students. Send your students to Chitter.TV.

Get them registered and then ask them to go to the Sky News channel at: <http://chitter.tv/index.php#skynews>. They will see a brief news summary of the main news stories of the moment. Ask them to watch the clip (it's about 2–3 minutes long) and post headlines for each news story in the clip and/or key facts to their Twitter stream. They'll be able to watch the news clip a few times as it loops, so this should give them some useful listening and summarizing practice. You could even get them to write complete sentences from the news clip, like a dictation. You could get them to comment on or describe what they have watched. You could get them to tweet about which of the news headlines they felt was most important or which was most relevant to them. You'll then be able to check out what they have written in their Twitter stream and correct or comment.

Research activities

a) In addition to tracking specific vocabulary items and focusing on meaning and usage, students can use the track function to follow events, proper names, movie titles, companies, etc. If students are all attending a large event together, they can use the tracking function to find and report any “Twitter Buzz” that has been created for it. Twitter trends can also be tracked by students using the *Twitter Search* (<http://search.twitter.com>) page and by using free web applications like *Twist* (<http://twist.flaptor.com>) and *Tweetmeme* (<http://tweetmeme.com/>).

Students can do this by making use of hashtags, touched upon earlier, a community-driven convention for adding additional context and metadata to one's tweets. A hashtag is created simply by prefixing a word with a hash symbol: #hashtag. Hashtags started to gain popularity during the 2007 San Diego forest fires when Nate Ritter used the hashtag “#sandiegofire” to identify his updates related to the disaster (Egersdorfer, 2010). A site called Hashtags (<http://www.hashtags.org>) provides real-time tracking of Twitter hashtags. To take advantage of this site and start using hashtags, a Twitter user should first follow the @hashtags Twitter user (<http://twitter.com/hashtags>). Followers will automatically be followed back, and this enables the service to recognize and index user's hashtags. Similarly, other sites such as Twemes (<http://twemes.com>) offers real-time tracking without the need to follow a specific Twitter account. Other services such as Summize (mentioned above at <http://search.twitter.com>), TweetChat (<http://tweetchat.com>), TweetGrid (<http://tweetgrid.com>), and Twitterfall (<http://twitterfall.com>) are also popular for following hashtags in real-time. Any search project making use of these tools can culminate in having students write reports, make presentations, or lead discussions on what they have researched.

b) Students can pursue a “Celebrity Follow.” They can follow any famous individual on Twitter who interests them, unless that person has privacy settings on and refuses a student's request to follow (though users who have set privacy to on are few). Famous people and professionals include the spectrum from Britney Spears to President Obama. There are several lists online, one being *Follow Famous* (<http://www.followfamous.com>). A lot of celebrity twitters can be found simply by finding one and checking whom that person is following, which is how the author's own list was created (see Appendix). The problem is finding English-speaking individuals that Japanese youth are likely to know, and trying not to limit the celebrities to entertainers in order to have some variety. However, it should be noted that in many celebrity cases, the Twitter account was created as a publicity stunt; the account is a mere fan club setup of sorts and the celebrity him/herself is not twittering.

Whether students are assigned a celebrity or do their own searching for one, they can follow that person for a few months, and then, as stated above, write a report, make a presentation, or lead a discussion or talk on what has been happening with the person or people they followed. It may be necessary for students to follow another person if the chosen celebrity does not produce a high volume of tweets.

c) Teachers can ask trivia questions and get students to collaborate to find the answers. Teachers can ask the question via the classroom account or use *Twtrivia* (<http://twitter.com/twtrivia>), the official daily trivia quiz on Twitter. Trivia activities might add to the enjoyment of one's study and provide for an interesting preview or add-on activity to another language task.

d) In his "Twittin' Secrets" series, David Hollings advises that if people (teachers) want to create a buzz about something (a book, news event, product, issue, etc.) they can send followers (students) on a treasure hunt to find information on it using Twitter. If there is a current event that teachers want students to be able to discuss in class, rather than just have them read newspapers etc., they can get students to see what the buzz is about it in the Twittisphere. The student(s) who find(s) the best and/or most information can be rewarded in some way, and may be better prepared for discussion. (Hollings, "9 Exclusive Twitter Tips & Secrets").

Teachers can create a "Treasure Hunt," in which clues have to be amassed in order, give them to individual students on paper in confidentiality, and have each student post one of the clues. Teachers need to word these posts carefully and assign one to each student with instructions to post it on Twitter. Each post will have a correlating clue number, an actual clue, as well as the Twitter username of the student holding the next clue. Teachers should check that all hints are posted before officially beginning the Treasure Hunt, and the last post should indicate that there are no more clues or loop back to the first one. The teacher can decide to create a page on his/her blog outlining the Treasure Hunt rules, and a link to that page can be included in each post.

This could work well for a short murder mystery: A story can be broken up into as many 140-character parts as needed, and distributed to students in confidence, with instructions. (Ideally, a class of 20 will get one or two hints each, but it will rarely work out perfectly; the story may have to be altered.) Once all students have posted their clues, they log onto Twitter, find and record all the clues (the teacher can start off with the first clue), and solve the puzzle once they have all of them. The first student(s) to send the correct answer in a direct (private) message to the teacher wins. Students can also be made to post their own paraphrasing of the full story with a solution on their blogs, thereby engaging in a writing activity after having done the reading work.

This type of activity could also work well for lateral thinking stories, grammar clozes, trivia questions, etc. The only limit is one's imagination. The main appeal for students in having any such language activity made into a hunt of sorts is that it is fun and exciting. Real, task-based reading-writing activities with rewards are very motivating particularly for those who are not intrinsically motivated. Of course, these activities require effort by the teacher to manage and come up with in the first place, and their real pedagogical value may depend on the goals, quality of the language content, and how it is presented to students.

Twitter keypals

Email is said to have taken over “snail mail,” and microblogging could eventually win over email for a great deal of applications. SNSs have already started to do that. (This author uses Facebook.com for personal correspondence far more frequently than email already.) Although Twitter is far from inherently private, it can be a great medium to foster new, electronic pen pal relationships between students.

a) Interclass. For a new class in which students do not yet know each other, students can be assigned Twitter keypals. They can use the medium to get to know each other and perhaps introduce the individuals to classmates, in oral or written form. Teachers of two or more classes can work together, assigning students Twitter keypals from other classes. Real relationships can bloom out of this activity.

b) Interschool. Teachers can collaborate in setting up relationships between the classes of different schools, perhaps different countries, and the latter is where a Twitter keypal project can get very interesting for students. Because of the forced brevity, any pressure to write a lot is gone.

Student-initiated learning activities

Of course, teachers can foster learning by encouraging students to feel free to write whatever they want: ask and thank each other for help or advice, write about something they did, saw, read, or have an interest in, offer information to each other that they feel might be helpful or interesting, start discussions on topics that interest them, etc.

Englishfeed (<http://twitter.com/englishfeed>) is a great twitter feed more advanced writing students can opt to follow that will allow them to study independently. Subscribers to the feed receive a notification of the grammar, idiom, or structure of the day as well as some examples, and can respond by writing their own example using that grammar, idiom or structure. They can participate as much as desired. If students want to see more, they can go to the Englishfeed Twitter page. Students can also sign up to follow other followers, thereby receiving other people’s examples automatically – a great way to improve understanding of the target English of the day, and make new friends internationally (Beare, “Learn English on Twitter”).

Other uses for teachers

In addition to class management and the initiation of student activities, teachers can make use of Twitter in other ways:

a) Teachers can poll their students via Twitter. Views from around the classroom can be obtained by posting a survey, question, or poll to the classroom Twitter account. This is a great medium to conduct class action research. Free applications like *Twtpoll* (<http://twtpoll.com>) or *PollDaddy* (<http://twitter.poll daddy.com>) are helpful in creating the questions. Of course, students can create and conduct their own surveys as well.

c) Twitter can also be a great medium for teachers to monitor the learning process. If students are required to tweet about their assignments, the things they learn, and the difficulties and successes they experience, Twitter can double as a class log this way, which can be useful to help the teacher better comprehend and assess each student's learning process. Moreover, when students write about these things, they end up doing the self-reflection and self-evaluation that is important to their learning.

d) As Parry (2009) points out, Twitter is really good for sharing short inspirations or thoughts that just pop into one's head out of nowhere. Not only can they be easily recorded for easy access later on, but doing so might elicit inspiration from others. Of course, this holds true for students in any type of class requiring creativity. Twitter therefore can work as a sort of brainstorming notepad.

e) Again, the beauty of Twitter is that it is so quick and easy to use, and that feedback can be instantaneous, especially when combined with the convenience of cell phones. Though not applicable to the typical communicative language classroom where cell phones are often prohibited, presenters in front of large, Twitter-enabled audiences can get feedback not right after their presentations, but during. In fact, tweets made during a presentation may be able to steer the direction of the presentation itself, and this actually already happens. (An assistant informs the presenter by passing along Twitter data as it streams in.)

Broader educational implications

In addition to explaining the rationale for adopting Twitter in the EFL classroom, this paper has offered some advice and activities to make good use of the platform. Before concluding, left to affirm are the broader educational implications that may surface while using the system. Clive Thompson (2007) says that Twitter has what he calls a social sixth sense; Twitter is more than the sum of its parts:

Individually, most Twitter messages are stupefyingly trivial. But the true value of Twitter ... is cumulative. The power is in the surprising effects that come from receiving thousands of pings from your posse. And this, as it turns out, suggests where the Web is heading.

What he means by this cumulative affect, and Parry (2009) says this well, is that by using Twitter students can develop "a sense of each other as people beyond the classroom space, rather than just students they [see] twice a week for an hour and a half." The better the understanding students have of each other, the more productive conversations in the classroom will be, as they are likely more willing to talk and are more respectful of others. What teacher would not welcome improvements in classroom dynamics?

Twitter also allows people to get a big picture of what is going on in the world. Although there is a lot of junk to filter through here, by scrolling through Twitter's *Public Timeline* (http://twitter.com/public_timeline), students can get a sense of how diverse the world is – different languages (although mostly English), different activities, different issues... It also shows what topics are currently of interest to people worldwide.

Conclusion

Twitter not only provides an good, alternative medium through which to improve students' written communication skills, but also their analytical, collaborative, and social networking skills. Add Twitter's ability to work as a simple management tool, and this microblogging system becomes an application very much worth considering for adoption in class.

It must be said, however, that Twitter is not the only option if teachers wish to introduce microblogging into their classrooms. There are other platforms that educators have had success with (such as Plurk, Edmodo (which is geared for education), ShoutEm, Pounce, Jaiku, Tumblr, MySay, Hictu, MoodMill...), and these may be preferred to Twitter because they have other desirable functions, such as, for example, the ability to more effectively deal with privacy concerns. However, Twitter has become the default mainstream microblogging platform, offers easy use and support, has a broad range of supportive software, already has a large (and sometimes attractively famous) user base, has Japanese language capabilities, and is cell-phone friendly. Also, because blogging by definition is a very public activity, Twitter might be the best choice.

Whether it is Twitter or another platform, since future generations will likely require more knowledge and skills in our Web2.0, inter-connective, increasingly cyberizing planet, teachers can only be helping un-wired students (a percentage of the student population which is admittedly shrinking) by requiring them to use such technologies as a tool for their learning. Becoming savvy with SNSs in turn will help students network in an increasingly online world. Steve Dembo, in "What I learned from Twitter today," says the same of teachers themselves: "There is nothing more important to teach educators about technology, than how to network."

Notes

1. Check pages like <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/a-brief-and-informal-twitter-etiquette-guide/> or just google "Twitter etiquette" to see what comes up.
2. To get an idea of how a 140 posts × 140 characters twittory can turn out, check <http://wpmu.thepodcastnetwork.com/twittories/twittory-1-the-darkness-inside/>. Participants only get one tweet per twittory.

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Author biodata

Cathrine-Mette Mork arrived in Japan in 1995 to teach in the **JET** program, and has continued to teach mostly at the university level since. Her experience spans from young children at private English schools, to retirees in community-sponsored continuing education classes. Her interests include intercultural communication, **CALL**, and learning strategies.

Appendix

Famous people on Twitter

http://twitter.com/ev	Evan Williams: CEO of Twitter
http://twitter.com/lancearmstrong	Lance Armstrong: 7-time Tour de France winner
http://twitter.com/serenajwilliams	Serena Williams: professional tennis player
http://twitter.com/THE_REAL_SHAQ	Shaquille O'Neal: basketball player
http://twitter.com/jtimberlake	Justin Timberlake: musician
http://twitter.com/snoopdogg	Snoopdogg: musician
http://twitter.com/Dolly_Parton	Dolly Parton: musician
http://twitter.com/britneyspears	Britney Spears: musician
http://twitter.com/RealHughJackman	Hugh Jackman: actor
http://twitter.com/mrskutcher	Demi Moore (Mrs. Kutcher): actor
http://twitter.com/aplusk	Aston Kutcher: actor
http://twitter.com/TheRealStallone	Sylvester Stallone: actor
http://twitter.com/langfordperry	Matthew Perry: actor

http://twitter.com/Janefonda	Jane Fonda: actor
http://twitter.com/kirstiealley	Kirstie Alley: actor
http://twitter.com/BarackObama	Barack Obama: President of the USA
http://twitter.com/richardbranson	Richard Branson: CEO of Virgin
http://twitter.com/tomfriedman	Tom Friedman: NY Times columnist and Pulitzer Prize winning author
http://twitter.com/TheEllenShow	Ellen DeGeneres: comedian
http://twitter.com/MarthaStewart	Martha Stewart: author, TV personality
http://twitter.com/kingsthings	Larry King: "Larry King Live" TV Interviewer
http://twitter.com/tonyrobbins	Tony Robbins: life and business coach