



## Twitter in the Elementary Classroom: A Teacher's Journey

*Holly Marich*

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This article focuses on a primary teacher's eight-week journey using an unfamiliar micro-blogging technology and its positive impact on her teaching as well as her students' learning.

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**K**atie rushed up next to me, iPad in one hand, notebook and pen in the other. With energy overflowing she began, "I can't wait to tell you about what my kiddos are doing!" Setting her notebook down, opened to a page full of scribbled notes about Twitter, she focused on her iPad, quickly tapped the Twitter app icon on the screen, and scrolled through her class Twitter feed, stopping on occasion to explain different tweets. "This is where Zoie tweeted her guess to the math 3D shapes riddle from Ms. Cassidy's class, and look here, Ms. Cassidy's class replied!" She continued to scroll, pausing again to explain other examples of student tweets.

I scrolled through the tweets, delighting in Katie's excitement, recalling her struggles and confusion with Twitter not so long ago. It had only been a month since Katie asked me questions in an email about how to get started with integrating Twitter in her classroom. Since then, we had been emailing off and on: in the beginning, she asked questions and shared concerns; I asked questions and shared ideas, resources, and encouraging words. Later, she shared her excitement and news of learning while I continued to support her.

The exciting work with Twitter in her second-grade classroom and my involvement happened serendipitously. I am a professional development provider working with teachers and schools in Katie's region on a variety of topics, including technology.

Katie was given my name when searching for guidance. Because I recognized the important work Katie was doing with her exploration of micro-blogging through Twitter in her classroom, I asked if I could document her journey to share with other teachers. Happily, she agreed.

What follows is a glance into Katie's journey, specifically Katie's eight-week journey from apprehension and concern about using a technology she was unsure of to excitement and disbelief about the positive impact it had on her second-grade students' learning and her teaching. I hope this column will help demystify Twitter for other teachers who, like Katie, realize they need to support their students' development of new literacies, including their experience with social media, but are uncertain about where to begin or what to do once they begin.

### Twitter, New Literacies, and "Twitteracy"

Evidenced by elementary-grade classroom Twitter accounts like @MrsWideensClass, @mscassidyclass, or @FourthGraders, and hashtags such as #edchat, #kinderchat, #1stchat, #2ndgrade (and similar hashtags for each grade), Twitter is being used at the elementary school level. Study results have suggested that Twitter has value educationally, not just for older students, but for elementary students as well (Kurtz, 2009; Waller, 2010). Additionally, a teacher's effective use of Twitter in the

classroom can help students gain the 21st-century skills they need (Junco, Elavsky, & Heiberger, 2013).

After reviewing the research on literacy education, Greenhow and Gleason (2012) argued that Twitter can foster new literacies in students. They defined new literacies as dynamic, situationally specific, multimodal, socially mediated, co-constructed, and participatory (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008; Lankshear, Knobel, & Curran, 2013). New literacy characteristics specific to Twitter include:

- dynamic: Twitter content is continuously changing over time
- situationally specific: e.g., a Twitter stream is specific to the online space and time
- multimodal: tweets may include any combination of text, image, video, or links
- socially mediated: account holders communicate around specific topics
- co-constructed: others can retweet, modify tweets, and reply to tweets

The authors conceptualized “Twitteracy”—that is, competent use of Twitter to communicate—as a form of new literacies, given the prevalence of social media in today’s digital world. Subsequently, the researchers established the importance of educating students about how to communicate effectively via social media, such as microblogging through Twitter.

### Katie’s Journey Begins

Hearing about “Twitteracy,” Katie decided to implement Twitter as a learning tool for her students. Her journey began with apprehension and concern about learning this unfamiliar technology. Foremost, she was concerned about knowing how to use Twitter as a tool for teaching and learning before bringing it into the classroom. After creating a personal Twitter account, she became familiar with the online space and took note of how other elementary teachers were using Twitter. Katie was also concerned about student cybersafety. Through her learning about

Twitter in the classroom, she discovered various ways to address this issue. For example:

- Use first names only, and no pictures tagged with names.
- Use a classroom account, such as @mscassidysclass.
- Only follow selected other classes or educational feeds.

Go to [support.Twitter.com](http://support.Twitter.com) for more information about setting up an account and establishing safety protocols.

### Launching and Learning

As Katie persevered through her concerns and unknowns, she bravely launched tweeting in her second-grade classroom. She decided to guide her students to tweet about the “what” and “why” of their learning. Through this tweeting, to her delight, students learned digital citizenship skills related to cyber-safety, online relationships, and communication. Students practiced generating concise tweets, exercising critical thinking, and refining metacognition skills. Also, they learned how to compose tweets using unique genre elements such as hashtags, @ signs, and the 140-character limit while practicing traditional writing conventions.

For both Katie and her students, this learning did not happen immediately. Katie spent about a month exploring Twitter for herself before bringing it to her students. Then, when previewing student tweets starting around week 3 and continuing to examine them for the remaining five weeks, tweets about the “what” and “why” of student learning gradually developed with increased detail and sophistication. Figure 1 provides examples of students’ tweets over time. Looking across from upper left to lower right, the first tweet illustrates a typical week 1 tweet, sharing classroom activity information. The second tweet from week 2 illustrates student work along with hashtags. The next tweet is from week 6 and illustrates how students typically expressed messages about the “what” and “why” of their learning. Finally, the last tweet from week 7 shows a student’s ability to tweet a concise and complete story about

Figure 1. Example tweets of varying complexity



her favorite pet. To meet the 140-character limit, the author of this last tweet decided to delete hashtags rather than words from her story.

Time requirements for composing tweets also changed over the eight weeks. During the first few weeks, students required around 20 to 30 minutes per tweet. By the end of the eight weeks, students were tweeting quickly and efficiently within 3 to 4 minutes. Additionally, the need for reminders to reread tweets for meaning or conventions or to rewrite to fit within the 140-character limit was reduced significantly. Most students were rereading the tweet and fixing grammar, punctuation, and capitalization before showing Katie for approval to publish—a routine she had established to closely monitor student tweets.

Around week four of Katie's journey, she gained confidence with Twitter in her classroom. She learned about @Skypeclassroom (<https://education.skype.com>), a resource connecting

classrooms to virtual fieldtrips, conversations with TED speakers, children's book authors, or other classrooms from around the globe. Using Skype in the classroom, Katie decided to set up visits from authors. The students tweeted questions to the guest authors and also spoke with them about books they had read. Additionally, around this same time, Katie's students tweeted responses to math shape riddles tweeted by students over a thousand miles away by @msscassidysclass. Tweeting a riddle response activated student use of correct mathematical vocabulary, such as edge, vertices, and pentagon, in addition to the riddle-solving deductive thinking skills (see Fig. 2).

### Reflecting and Refining

Through Katie's willingness to explore a new technology, she discovered Twitter can be a useful space for teaching and learning. Beyond the benefits of student learning, she reported that opening

**Figure 2.** Riddle response example tweets

her classroom to the world through Twitter made her a more reflective and effective teacher. In fact, Katie acknowledged that making her teaching public through classroom tweets motivated her strategic use of best teaching practices in all she asked of her students. She believed this constant reflecting on the what, why, and how of her teaching made her a better teacher.

Twitter in the elementary classroom may be a technology you are inspired to try. If you have tried Twitter in your classroom, I would love to hear about your journey and how this technology has

impacted both your and your students' learning. Contact me via Twitter at @hollymarich.

### Author's Note

I would like to thank Mrs. Hammer and her second-grade students for inviting me into their learning experience so that I could tell their story.

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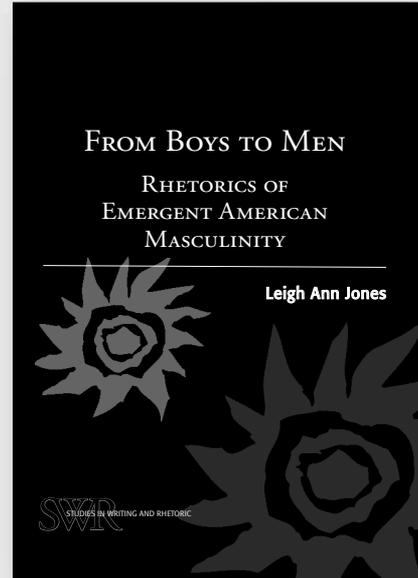
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Institutional, organized expressions of male coming-of-age encourage Americans to believe that emergent masculinity is an enduring natural phenomenon and an essential component of American identity, and that the outcomes of the transformation process from boy to man have important consequences for the United States as a nation. Leigh Ann Jones explores performances of developing young male identity in case studies from twentieth- and twenty-first-century federal and civic organizations that recruit boys and young men using appeals to American national identity, often coding these appeals as character building.

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