

It's neat to tweet

Twitter gains classroom credibility

You can't escape Twitter these days. Elizabeth Taylor (@DameElizabeth) tweeted about her grief following Michael Jackson's death; Iranians used the site to communicate with one another and the outside world in their election struggles (#iranelection).

The concept of Twitter is simple. Users post messages of no more than 140 characters that answer the question "What are you doing?" A Twitter user's followers read the messages at www.twitter.com, on their cell phones or via third-party browser plug-ins.

What's made Twitter take off is the broad way Twitter users are answering "What are you doing?" They're posting links to interesting news articles, tweeting their way through conferences and conversing on current events. They're even using Twitter as an educational tool.

In no more than 140 characters

Some of the first academic applications for Twitter occurred in the university environment, when professors realized that requiring students to tweet about their lectures meant that students would take in information, reflect on the most important points and summarize those points succinctly. But K-12 educators are finding Twitter useful, too. Second-graders at two elementary schools in Maine became pen pals through Twitter. Their teachers told WSCH-TV that using Twitter improved students' writing skills. A Twitter project that began in one eighth-grade classroom in Maryland grew into a col-

laborative story written by more than 100 students in six countries (@manyvoices).

School administrators are using Twitter to communicate with parents, who can follow Twitter feeds without signing up for the site (either by bookmarking a Twitter profile page or by subscribing to its RSS feed). In Eanes ISD, Westlake High School administrators (@WH5Chaps) post tweets such as "2nd & 6th period finals. Seniors take 8th this afternoon. Tutorials and Study Halls this PM for everyone else." Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City ISD (@SCUCISD), the first Texas school district affected by the H1N1 flu virus, used Twitter to update the community during school closings: "public events, mtgs and appts sched thru Sunday, 5-3-09 at any

SCUC school, facility, gym etc have been canceled or pppd until further notice."

Twitter has also become a professional development tool. Educators who attended the National Educational Computing Conference June 28–July 1 in Washington, D.C., posted tweets about their experiences and marked them with the hashtag #NECC so that fellow Twitter users could search Twitter for posts related to the conference.



SOME TWEETING LINGO AND ETIQUETTE

Ready to tweet? Here's some Twitter-speak and behavior you'll need to know

@username—If you want to post a reply to a fellow user or mention him, include an @ symbol and that person's username in your tweet.

RT @username—If you want to repeat someone else's tweet, you're posting a "retweet." Be sure to include "RT" and "@username" before the copied message.

#hashtag—Tweeting on a hot topic, like the latest episode of *Lost*? Include a hash mark and the topic (e.g., #Lost) in your tweet so other users interested in the subject can find what you have to say.

TECH
TERM

Tweet: A posting to the Web site Twitter that answers the question "What are you doing?" FYI, this definition has 138 characters; 140 is the max.