

TWEETER - A TECHNOLOGICAL TOOL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

MONALISA NAYAK JASH

Assistant Professor, Vishnu Institute of Technology, Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Exploration and experimentation are two key terms in any teacher's life; without them teaching becomes monotonous. Continuing professional development (CPD) is accepted as an integral part of teacher education because only a continuous practice of teaching and learning assures a high level of expertise and enables the teachers to keep their professional skills and knowledge up-to-date with the need of the present generation. CPD therefore should not be regarded only as an obligatory activity just to meet the requirement of the classroom but teachers should start thinking beyond the newest pedagogical approaches and also concentrate on relevant and up-to-date knowledge in the use of technology and latest interesting tools of teaching with entertainment. In this regard we can talk about role of social media which can be termed as an excellent tool for teaching the present generation challenging youngsters and correlate with their technical savvy mind. The educators need to view it as an opportunity to develop professionally as well as to improve their classroom skills by not being restricted to the classroom itself rather they can reach out to the need of the students beyond hours at their availability through some social media like Twitter. Longer serving teachers are not necessarily reluctant to change their CPD. Therefore this paper primarily will focus on encouraging longer serving teachers to stay in touch with the recent developments and continue to challenge their practice by making innovations regarding lesson plans, assignment based learning, grammar and vocabulary practices through activities and games, getting connected to a wide range of educators discussing over a vast innovative ideas in language teaching as well as learning through entertainment and maintaining 24X7 relationship with students and CPD through Twitter, a world which brings the first alteration in an educator's life that a single 'Click' matters a lot than that of Papers. This paper intends to bring out all those new techniques and developing changes which lead to proficient teaching by a specialist.

KEYWORDS: English Language, Twitter, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Let's Tweet in the Paperless World

Present day teaching professionals are made to adopt a new paradigm as their preparation is based on self-direction and personal validation with complex methods of technology yet repeatable practice environment. It is supported by emerging interdisciplinary knowledge concerning the unique affordances of digital media for social networking and professional assessment as well. A glimpse of the past reveals that the social media has already been integrated into an informal education system for decades. Now-a-days social media has emerged as the most sophisticated way of upgrading oneself and of practicing self informative way of upgradation.

When we look into the profession of an educator we find a certain pause in the preparation very often and the term "monotony" is quite habitual. The teachers of the present generation will be at falter to match up with the traditionally growing aged students with their unique intellect of understanding as they are a different kind of learners which any

experienced ever faced in the past. This generation of digital natives has caught educators flat footed. So to correlate with those numerous computerized minds the educators have to advance with Continuous Professional Development using the latest attractive social media and network where they get a chance outside the professional formal platform and can experiment the new techniques of teaching and upgradation. Educators need to artifice with the outer world matching the interest of the students and that can be possible only when they can match their technological wavelength with the students who are very advanced in the present days. So we, the educators need to get a start with the different ways of technologies and also elevate ourselves with new course assignments and enriching our contacts with different professionals. An educator needs to be observant and be passionate towards learning from other teachers and chase the new paths of teaching interestingly.

In synchronization with the changing times we educators should incorporate the latest trends in information technology like Web 2.0 (Hargadon). The World Wide Web facilitated information exploring, sharing and networking in phenomenal manner. Social networking has changed the entire way of communicating making the entire world a platform and it can also be used for education; hence it may be called education networking. Blogging, microblogging, location, aggravators and social networks like Wordplus, Tumblr, Twitter, Yammer, Foursquare, Facebook, Space, Polyglot, Social Book Marking Sites have facilitated communication at any instant of time reaching out to ample network of people.

Informal learning is a part of the new learning methodology. Where people form a network. And microblogging or twitter supports it extensively. It has caught the fancy of many a people with its brief yet efficient way of communication. It is a microblog where an idea can be communicated through short messages restricted to 140 characters. McFedries (2007) provided the following definition: “A microblog can be seen as a weblog that is restricted to 140 characters per post but is enhanced with social networking facilities”. Through different tools like Jaiku, Pownce, Plurk, Lacomina we can tweet our ideas and opinions. We can also post links using hash tag which will directly lead us to the blog or video or you tube or webinar.

In Twitter we get updates of different people who might tweet of something which matches our interest so we can be a member in the discussion panel and also get connected to the experts through chatrooms or skype where we can discuss and share online where many experts will be connected together. For being in regular touch with some resource persons we have some link like **English feed**. If we once follow this link, we get the updates on what the other people are doing on that day, by writing an example using grammar, idiom or structure of the day. Even this link works for new materials on grammar & vocabulary which they post time to time for improvement of the educators as well as student's benefit.

The British Council CPD framework for teachers of English specifies a range of skills and knowledge to evolve from the novice to the Specialist. To grow from the beginner or novice to the specialist one needs to continuously learn, Lesson plans, assignments planning courses, understanding the learners needs and learning styles, and adopting latest technologies, evaluation finding resources, reflecting on teaching and learning and pursuing research and publishing-all can be done through twitter through networking with professionals where there will be a lot of contributing, collaborating and creating. (Hargadon)

A novice to the social media for utilizing it to teaching can start browsing certain links where many activities and games are found on both grammar and vocabulary so as to be proficient in terms of teaching content and innovative

teaching strategies. Similarly the skills of listening, reading and writing can also be imparted using novel methods. Several links like Learn English_BC from the British Council can be accessed through Twitter. Others like **EnglishTips4U**, **English247**, **CambridgeWords**, etc are other potential resources. **BBCle** is an excellent resource for idioms. The educator will gain command on incorporating technology with teaching. Twitter is useful in the sense that students can be reached at their flexible timings when they can share their thoughts other than the classrooms and accordingly the educators can plan for short assignments and projects and some videos and presentations for the students to work into it. Online tasks both for the educators and the learners are interesting sources of learning other than that of traditional way of learning in a classroom where there is only information transmission. With such things the students will also be encouraged to come out of their shakiness and participate more and more into public activities which will raise their confidence as well as exposure.

CPD says we have to be proficient at every work we are doing. For being proficient we need to upgrade our knowledge and skills reflecting more deeply on teaching and learning and also more actively creating networks with other teachers worldwide. Keeping up with the process of development and sharing, Twitter gives us a chance to read the latest tweets by excellent professionals and educators which can make some difference in the way of our learning. In Twitter we can access the updates in the latest development of education. As is the common feature of all social media we can share and discuss our ideas with other educators in Twitter at every interval.

Even we can share our ideas regularly at a particular point of time by forming a Chatroom. We can tweet some new ideas on planning lessons and courses, understanding assignments and managing lessons, evaluation and assessment in technical teaching and ask other professionals for their feedbacks and suggestion. We can upload interesting innovative videos of our classroom or certain activities we can make our students do and ask for expert's comments and play a pivotal role in continuous professional development to other young challenging educators. For our own reference we always have the freedom to access different videos on different topics by different teachers throughout the world. Likewise we can develop our own materials and also improve the quality of our materials. There are some English clubs in Twitter, free club for learners and teachers of English worldwide. We can use the tag **#twinglish** to practice English on Twitter.

Most essentially in our hectic life we hardly get a chance to meet with scholars at a regular interval so social media like Twitter get us connected to all sorts of people from whom there is a lot to learn and imitate and discuss opinions on both practice and policy, blogs on a range of subjects and e-learning packages that support self-directed learning and practice development.

Once we have mastered the tweet and want to expand into networking, we will come across Educator PLN. Today, **Educator** is a Ning community of educators who participate in discussions, and share videos and resources. The final way to attract some follows when starting up is to follow hashtags, we will find some very useful educators under the following tags, and we can simply search for these in the twitter search feature at the top of the page:

#ukedchat

#edtech

#elearning or #elearn

#mlearn

#ipadchat

With these resourceful persons we can always enter into a new experimental world of teaching.

From a CPD point of view technology is opening up options for us that have never been available before, and personally I think that should be celebrated and promoted. Professionals believe their better understanding of the subject can be represented if they can present or publish their thoughts or work in papers so social media gives that opportunity to access through different author's writings and also execute our own and get it published into different journals. Wikipedia and You Tube give us the opportunity to research through a varied range of materials and intensify our thoughts into greater level. Through Twitter we get the opportunity to connect to some journals as well as publishing house where we have a chance to contribute our experimental masterpiece. Sometimes some workshop or seminars are held at distant places where it might not be possible to reach so then atleast we can get the updates on the different papers and go through the different discussions and the contents as discussed. Even we can access through various online libraries and drill a wide range of reading in our area of interest in Twitter.

As a mandatory part of education Feedback system has taken a prime role in any institution now-a-days. So even if we are in Twitter we get a chance to collect the feedback from a varied range of experts through whom we can rectify our errors and even get recommendations and appreciation for our work which helps in gaining confidence and plan for a new twist in our teaching methodologies. This is a platform of huge depth and diversity of ideas and resources to be shaped by different teachers. An interesting input we have in twitter is every Thursday evening from 8 p.m to 9 p.m there is a "ukedchat" CPD session where teachers share their ideas on an educational or topic that has been voted for in the preceding week. All of the tweets need to contain the hashtag #ukedchat to feature in this fluid online collaboration. To join in with the fast moving but amazingly compelling group discussion, all we need to do is type #ukedchat into the search feature and we are through. Users will share links, resources and ideas and others will retweet if they like what they see. The moderator will periodically pose challenging questions or thoughts that will then be discussed. We are sure to be left breathless at the 9pm "close of play", but will be armed with a plethora of new ideas with which to implement in our classroom or just the satisfaction of having shared our ideas with others and getting feedback for execution of any idea. So we can always give it a go as we never know what we might learn.

With these, educators can participate in the new era of professional development-an era of idea exchange that is accessible anywhere, anytime and that connects the field's brightest minds. These newly qualified tools are real-time, cost-effective, and accessible around the world, and they are driven by practitioners not by theoreticians. Social media-facilitated idea sharing and online personal learning networks also bypass the challenges of traditional professional development, including time and money constraints, uninterested participants, and an over emphasis on irrelevant or boring content. These are the areas of developing which makes the basic of continuous professional development stronger.

If we are able to make ourselves the prime natives of updated technology then we can fulfill the last criteria of CPD that is we can be the specialist in our own interested areas within the vast subjects. There are many ways to enhance our skills and lessons through social media. Sometimes we find our students not interested in class may be the classes go too long or stressful. Even we are sometimes stopped at a point to give our best performance because of elongated hours so in that case we have an advantage of this type of social networks like Twitter. As it contains only 140 characters so short

assignments can be easily planned and posted to the students in a mode of competition or else as a quiz or puzzle to other educators for learning through entertainment. So Twitter as the name suggests a high pitch sound produced by a small bird, gave us the opportunity to upgrade ourselves, boost ourselves and innovate us to give a new interesting angle to our teaching as well as learning.

Once we start tweeting, can qualify newly as developers and proficient educators in advanced language teaching as well as learning ourselves. We become the specialist with the process of continuous professional development. Face, tweet & link – in the space of the sky.

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