

Twitter – A Professional Learning Tool

By Sue Osborne (Library Monitor)

Since I wrote my last column I have been wracking my brain for a topic to discuss in this one. Then I attended Reading Matters 2017 in Melbourne and it all became clear to me. Twitter. But not just Twitter: Twitter as a professional development tool; Twitter as a force for awareness, for change. Twitter has been around for a long time now, at least in social media terms. Launched on 21 March 2006, Twitter is approaching its twelfth birthday stronger than ever.

I have been a member of Twitter since September 2010, so I class myself as a long-time user. At first, I just followed libraries and a few celebs. That lasted about two years. I attended a SLAV reading conference in November 2012, and it was then I realised the professional development potential of this 140-character phenomenon. Not only could I follow what others at the conference were thinking and saying, I could also comment on it, and allow my colleagues not attending to see what was happening. In real time. After that I started paying more attention to what was going on, and how Twitter was being used.

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I tweet at every conference I attend, and at almost every launch, event or speech too. If there is a #hashtag for it, I will use it. Go out and check my history at @LibraryMonitor. There you will see it all. I can go back through that history and see what I thought was worth noting at each of those events. I can also, by searching the hashtags for each event (and they all have them), see what others were thinking and saying too. Doing this is also a fantastic way to connect with like-minded people you have never met before. After attending and tweeting at Reading Matters 2013 (#YAmatters), I was surprised to meet delegates at the 2013 SLAV Reading Conference who had read my tweets and were now following me! They recognised me from my Twitter avatar and, four years later, I consider some of them to be some of my closest professional friends and collaborators.

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This allows me to have the material in front of me as well as the observations and comments I, and other tweeters, have made during the presentation. It makes my reports more readable, and more accurate, and that is important when one's principal or library director is footing the bill.

Tweeting at a conference can also lead to some amazing side projects and discussions. I well remember, at Reading Matters 2015, a panel talking about the state of play in YA Lit. Sean Box, then the Curriculum Manager for the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, was quite certain about why Australian young adult literature was not suitable for use in the curriculum at a Year 11 or 12 level. When Sean uttered the words "YA could not maintain the depth of study" required for VCE study, at about 3:45 in the YouTube video listed in the references for this article, it felt like the air was sucked out of the room. You can't hear it in the video, but in the audience, there was an audible intake of breath from the delegates. And then Twitter exploded. #YAmatters was already trending, but after that it was one of the top-trending hashtags for the day across Australia. The discussion generated by that four-minute conversation kept going, and going. That night, a group of authors, publishers, teachers and librarians, including myself, met for a drink and were galvanised into action to become vocal #LoveOzYA advocates. The movement had already started, but that night was what really propelled it forward. Two years later, #LoveOzYA is going strong and has a clear voice.

Of course, Twitter is as susceptible to 'fake news' and 'alternative facts' as any other social medium and with only 140 characters to work with sometimes things can go awry. #covfefe, anyone? It is important that as a

profession, teacher-librarians and librarians are highly aware of the dangers of accepting all social media at face value. Before retweeting anything, click on the link that takes you back to the source. Sometimes this can take more than the two clicks most people stop at. In MY early tweeting days, I was as guilty of this as anyone. I vividly remember retweeting the infamous 'Richard Wilkins dies' tweet many years ago and feeling a fool when he tweeted that he was alive and well. I will talk more about fake news in my next column.

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We owe it to ourselves, our students and our colleagues to be vigilant and professional about how we use tools like Twitter. Tweets are, after all, nothing more than short essays or articles, so we should try to be rigorous when using Twitter as a curation tool. Treat Twitter with respect, and it will repay you with up-to-date news, information, and entertainment. It is my most valuable professional development tool, and even an instrument for change. It should be yours too. If you are not using Twitter yet, and I bet there are some of you out there who aren't, you should give it a go.

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References

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