EDG14 DEVELOPING LEARNING RESOURCES

Twitter in learning
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What is Twitter?

Twitter (https://twitter.com/) is a microblogging tool. While one can write long passages of information in a traditional blog, the allowable content of a microblog is significantly smaller in size. For example, users of Twiiter can only post and read messages of up to 140 characters. The content of a Twitter message (called a *Tweet*) can include short sentences, images, or URLs. Tweets are publicly available on the internet, however, senders of tweets can restrict the delivery of messages to only their followers.

Twitter is used widely for marketing and advertising. However, there is a growing use of it in education for teachers and learning, and research.

Why should teachers use Twitter?

Twitter is not for the faint-hearted! I mean Twitter is not fun! You don't expect Twitter to be like Facebook or MySpace. When you sign up for Twitter, you don't expect people to start following you or responding to your tweets. You don't get the same social experience you get in Facebook when you are in Twitter.

So why should you use Twitter?

Hopkins (2009) describes Twitter as "digital communication" and "a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers". Twitter is one effective way of staying connected to your colleagues, students, family and friends. Smart (2011) has this to say about us and Twitter:

> Teachers should have Twitter accounts because they like to stay informed about education and they like to learn new ideas about teaching. Twitter lets you do that better than any other tool on the Internet.   (Smart, 2011)

To grow professionally, and to stay abreast of advances in teaching and our subject areas, we need to stay connected to up-to-date information. Twitter is the tool that allows you to be connected to a constant flow of information about anything. Twitter connects you to a number of talented educators who share links to excellent resources and ideas.

With Twitter, you are totally in total control of your own learning; you control the type of information you have access to, who you are receiving information from, when and for how long you want to learn, and where you want to learn.

In fact, you can still find Twitter fun! But in order to fully appreciate this tool, you must have a genuine reason for using it (Hopkins, 2009). If you are a person who genuinely likes learning, independently of others, I'm sure you'll love Twitter. Let's learn from Tan's (2012) experiences with Twitter:

> "I love Twitter. I like it more than Facebook… My Facebook account is like a passport that I use to establish who I am and to occasionally get me from one place to another. Twitter is my newspaper, information aggregator, bridge builder, mirror, magnifying glass, loud hailer, and more. (Tan, 2012)
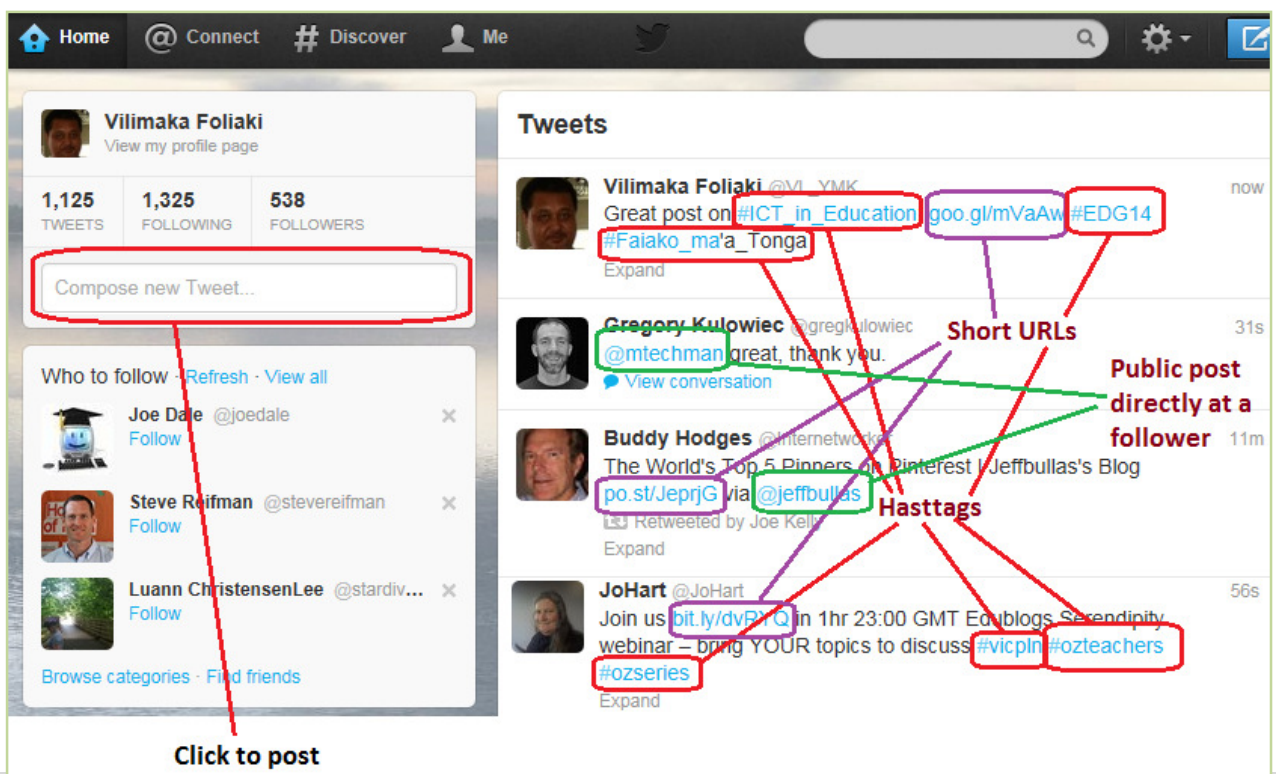
Unique Twitter features

Twitter is different from other social networks in many respects. However, I believe that two features that effectively make Twitter stand out from the rest are:

- 140 characters limit!
- constant flow of posts or twitter updates.

Some important Twitter language

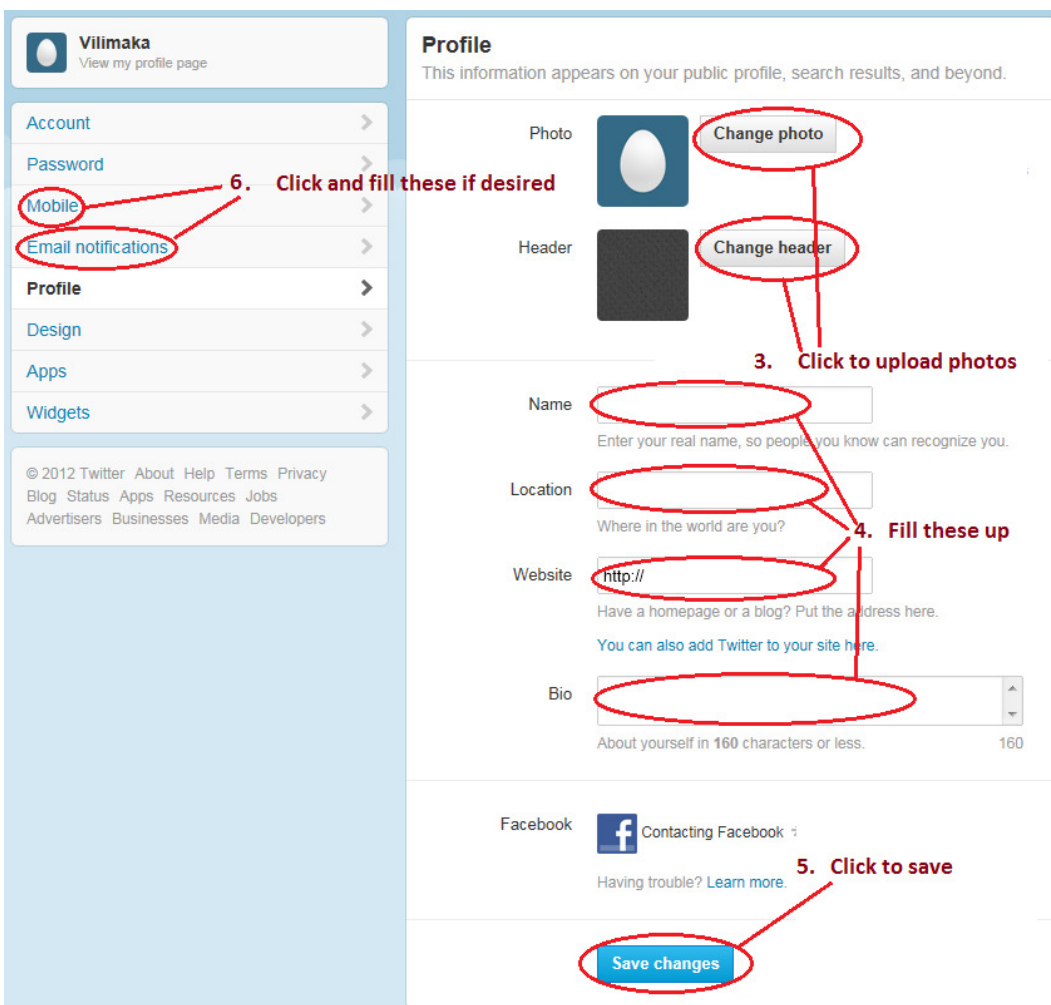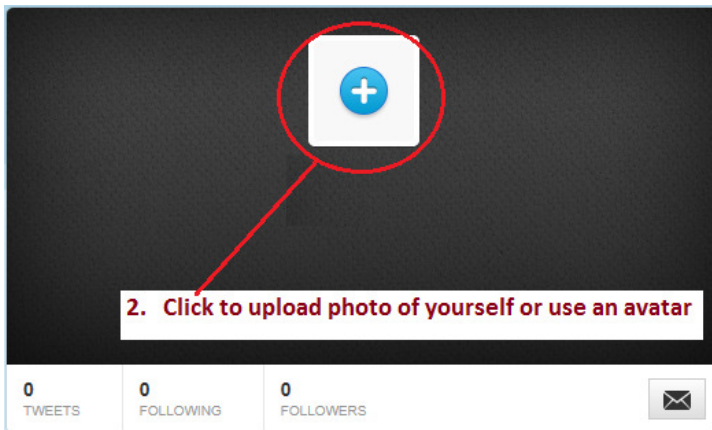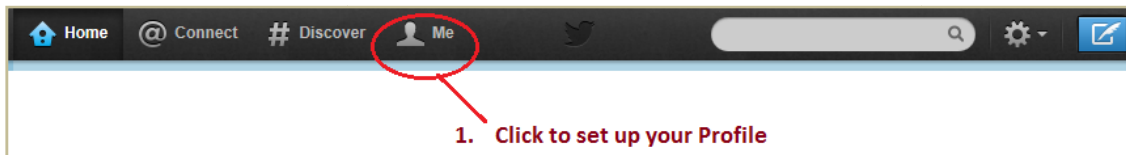To be a proficient user of Twitter, these are some very important words which you must know:

- *Tweet* = post.
- *Retweet* or *RT* = reposting someone else's tweet
- The "at sign" (@) in front of a username (e.g.) @VL_YMK results in a open (public) posting to another person (a follower).
- *Message* or *DM* means sending a private direct message to a follower.
- *Hashtag* is a word or combination of words with the hash sign (#) in front of it. (e.g.#tonga, or #Faiako-ma'a-Tonga, or #EDG14, or #tongarugby). A hashtag is used to organize tweets. Discussions can be grouped and tracked using their hashtags. You can use Twitter search to search for discussions (both current and past) on any topic which you hashtagged.

To use Twitter

1. Sign up for a Twitter account in https://twitter.com/
   This may take a while.

2. Set up your Twitter profile by following the instructions below:

3. Send out a tweet. For example: Hello world!

Now, you have just completed your Twitter account. You can always update your profile later by simply going through the same steps that you've just followed.

Responsible use of Twitter

As with all other forms of communication, there are also rules to follow when using Twitter.

- **What's bad in real life is bad in Twitter**
  Although it is important to be yourself in Twitter, being rude will not get you anywhere. Be polite and professional. It is also important to note that nothing posted online should ever really be considered private. Tweets are public and having a negative internet footprint can harm one's reputation.
- **Don't spam**
  Spammers don't get followers. Spamming take diverse forms – from making rude or unclear posts to following lots and lots of people (in the hope that they'll follow in return). Spamming is considered rude, and spammers are the enemies of serious Twitter users.
- **Tweet ONLY what's important**
  If your posts are important, people will read them. If your followers find value in your tweets, they will share them with their own followers.
- **Keep to 140 characters**
  Try your best to be clear and concise. This takes practice but such process will help you gain a better understanding of the idea that you share. It improves your creativity, and it ensures that your tweets are read. Use links to direct readers to resources to read for themselves. Use URL shorteners to shorten long URLs.
- **Say thank you**
  Acknowledge followers who retweet (RT) your posts. For example: *Thanks @VL_MK for the RT*.
- **Follow those who follow you**
  Follow back people who follow you. Don't lurk.
- **Start getting active once you have signed up for Twitter**
  Create something new. Say something worth sharing.

Security of your Twitter account and your computer

In regards to the security of your Twitter account, you need to be vigilant to phising attacks, hackers, and viruses. The Twitter security page offers the following tips:

- Use a strong password.
- When logging in to Twitter, always make sure you're on Twitter.com before you enter your login information. Always look at the URL when you log in and make sure that it is https://www.Twitter.com/
- Don't entrust your login information to third party applications – especially to those who are promising you more followers or monetary benefits.
- Ensure your computer and operating system is up-to-date with the most recent updates, and anti-virus software.
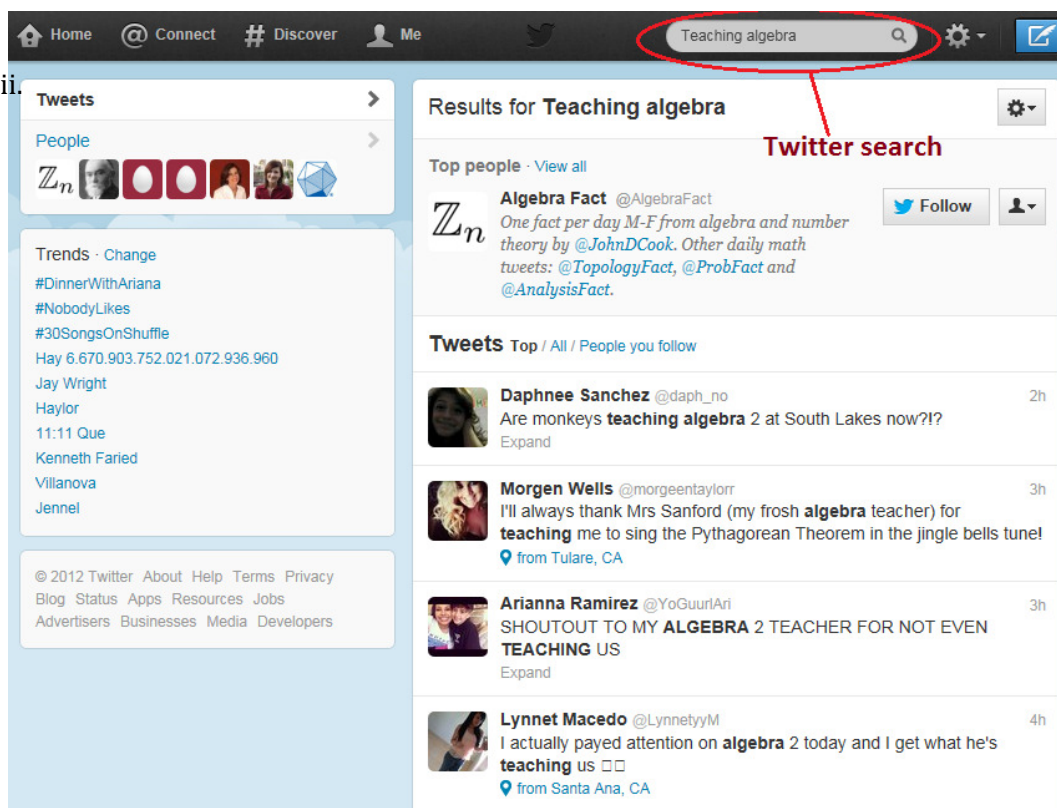
EXERCISE

Warning: Read the section *Responsible use of Twitter*.

1. Sign up for Twitter and sign in. Fill in your profile thoroughly. The information in your profile will help Twitter initially to suggest followers for you.

2. Identify 3-5 people to follow. You will slowly build this number as you get more experienced with Twitter. Look for people whose interests are similar to yours – they are educators, teachers, teaching the same subjects you are teaching, interested in the use of ICT in education. These are the people who will help you learn. So choose carefully.

   Effective ways of identifying good people to follow include:
   i. Using Twitter search to search for current and past discussions on key issues which are of interest to you. For example, the following screenshot shows some of the Tweets that got listed when I used the search word "Teaching algebra". You then go through the Tweets and only follow those whose Tweets are important and genuine. You may need to check out the profile of people to help you make the decision of whether or not to follow them.

   ii.

3. Follow me @VL_YMK or @Vilimaka (if you want).

4. Look for web-based resources that are relevant to your assignment 2 (Parts 1 and 2). You can search for these using a search engine (e.g. Google search) or *Twitter search* in Twitter.

5. Read and study the resources in (4) above and post tweets – about your learning. Use the hashtags #Faiako and #EDG14. These hashtags will enable us to meet online in Twitter. Include the URL of resources you are tweeting about. Keep to the 140 character limit.

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