

Tweeting for a Cause

How one adult learner uses Twitter in her activism

Erik Jacobson interviews Kathryn Ssedoga

Twitter is an online social network that allows people to share messages with a large number of people at the same time. These messages, called tweets, are limited to 140 characters each. When you “follow” somebody on Twitter, you receive the tweets that they send out.

Some people think Twitter is a waste of time, because many people tweet about little things, like what they had for lunch. Other people think Twitter is important, because it allows people to connect. For example, people tweeting important information was crucial during the recent revolution in Egypt. In this way, tweeting can be used for political activism.

Kathryn Ssedoga is someone who sees Twitter as a valuable resource for her own activism. She describes herself as “a justice seeking hell raiser who howls at the moon every chance she gets.” She tweets about First Nations (Native Canadian) issues and Restorative Justice. She has been tweeting for two years, and now has over 183,000 followers (which she noted was more people than live in her town). Go to <twitter.com> to explore Twitter. You can follow Kathryn at @ssedoga.



Try Twitter!

Kathryn recommends:

- Restorative Circles @RestoraCircles
- Writer about race and restorative justice, Mikhail Lyubansky @mikhail
- Psychologists for Social Responsibility @PsySR_org
- Grassroots group opposing unilateral & colonial legislation @Idlenomore4
- Native TrailBlazers @VinceSchilling
- Aboriginal People’s TV Network @APTN
- @LastRealIndians
- @indiancountry
- Native artist and wonderful on Twitter: @aaronpaquette

Why are you interested in Twitter?

First, it is an awesome newsfeed. About two years ago I started using Twitter seriously. At that time, there was a military action in Brazil and there was a lot of chaos. It was interesting to get tweets coming from there, even when they were in Portuguese. I figured out how to use Google Translate, and I could translate these tweets. The mainstream media wasn’t really covering the story, but I could hear about what was happening from people who were right there.

Another strong point about Twitter is that you can actually dialogue with people. It builds relationships. For me, Restorative Justice is my passion, and it is about dialogue and relationships. What is truly transformational is when people are heard in the way they need to be heard. People may think that you can’t really engage in deep listening online. It’s true that it can be difficult, but I don’t think that is a good reason not to try.

Can you give me an example of a time when tweeting turned into dialogue?

Once I tweeted about a petition to close the Guan-

#TwitterTerms

People in the “twitosphere” create “hashtags” to organize their updates for Twitter search engines. “Twitterers,” aka “Tweeters,” prefix a message with a community-driven hashtag (#) so that others can find their posts. “IDK” if you would like to “cr8” your own hashtags. If you would, visit <www.twitter.com> and give it a try. For more Twitter terms and abbreviations visit the Twitter dictionary.

Source: Learn more Twitter terms and abbreviations at: <www.webopedia.com/quick_ref/Twitter_Dictionary_Guide.asp>

tanamo Bay prison camp. Somebody responded, “Why should we close it? Isn’t that the best place for terrorists?” The first thing I tweeted back to this person was a 140-character version of what President Obama said about America not needing the camp to be safe and that detaining people indefinitely without charging them is not what America is about. I also gave him an article and a link to something from Psychologists for Social Responsibility about torture. And the man said, “Wow – thank you. I didn’t know.”

Why is dialogue so important to you?

One of the things that I’ve taken on is really trying to hear people. I have many people following me, and I do have some people who would be identified as “trolls” (people who leave comments that are purposefully offensive). I really try to dialogue



Protesters in front of the White House make their demand. Share what you know about Guantanamo. Research to learn more. What do you think the President should do?

with them. I say, “Is this what you want me to understand?” I don’t just parrot back their words, but I try to put it in my own words and say, “Is this what is important to you? I hear this is really important to you. Is that what you want understood?” It is exciting sometimes when I get to see a shift occur in somebody who came across as wanting to fight with me. When they have been heard about what their values are and what is important to them, you can actually have a conversation with them. I think if I’m communicating with somebody, I like to remember that they have feelings, and they’re a person, and they have value.

How do you choose Twitter accounts to follow?

I find people to follow by looking at who follows accounts I like (such as @injusticefacts). Many people are looking for people to be on their side. They judge, “Are you with me, or are you against me?” They only want to follow people that are on their side. But I also follow people who do not believe what I believe. I follow people who think very differently from me because I ultimately believe in world peace. If I can only talk to people who believe the same things I do, that is not going to lead me in the direction I want the world to go.

How has being an adult learner affected your Twitter experience?

Different people at different times assumed that I have much more education than I do. I don’t put down what my education is, but there are people who have thought that I’m a professor of social work. But you know what? Adult learners may not have advanced degrees, but we are thoughtful and have a great deal of lived experience. We are intelligent and have strong opinions. With Twitter, people are labeling me up, rather than down.

Erik Jacobson is active in adult literacy in the United States and Japan as a teacher and researcher. He also likes to do professional development around the use of technology. Kathryn Ssedoga is of the Mi’kmaq First Nation. She is a learner and lives in Southern Ontario Canada. She brings passion to everything she does and lives out her values with integrity and honor.