

An Introduction to Twitter Education Chats

Edchats are a good way to grow your personal learning network. Here's how to get started with them.

By Robert Ward (<http://www.edutopia.org/users/robert-ward>)

June 30, 2017



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Teachers must be models of lifelong learning, but besides occasionally reading books and blogs, attending conferences, and collaborating with a handful of colleagues at school, how can we extend both the reach and frequency of our interactions with our fellow educators?

Twitter education chats (edchats) are the answer for an increasing number of teachers and administrators, who eagerly participate in these online sessions because doing so meets their professional growth needs as well as their desire to contribute to the education conversation. Building a strong and satisfying personal learning network (PLN) through edchats gives you your own professional support system and a reliable resource for the cutting edge in education—all in real time.

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Once you become part of this global community of educators, you'll find a sense of professional camaraderie that will help you through the tough times. Don't underestimate what a small group of like-minded, enthusiastic educators can do for you and for each other, and thus for a great number of children.

Many of the most connected, compassionate, and creative educators regularly network on Twitter and congregate in chat sessions, where they generously share their passion, wisdom, and experience in nurturing and educating children.

Finding the Edchats to Grow your PLN

Twitter education chats occur daily throughout the school year, as well as during the summer, generally in the evenings. Most have an overriding theme or focus on a specific subject or grade level. All edchats feature a set of questions that the chat participants respond to and discuss. Chats usually last one hour, but you may jump in and/or leave at your convenience.

Visit [participate.com/chats](https://www.participate.com/chats) (<https://www.participate.com/chats>) to easily find the current day's edchats that interest you and work with your schedule. There are a wide variety of weekly chats, with many occurring during a regular time slot. Some states even have their own edchats, but anyone is welcome to take part in any chat.

(For a more detailed explanation of these chats and suggestions for how they can be improved, see my blog post "[Improving Twitter Education Chats](https://rewardingeducation.wordpress.com/2017/06/29/improving-twitter-education-chats/) (<https://rewardingeducation.wordpress.com/2017/06/29/improving-twitter-education-chats/>) .")

Lurking, Learning, and Leading

There is nothing to lose and much to gain by joining edchats. You are free to enter a chat without anyone else knowing you're there, so you can listen and learn at your own pace. This is affectionately known as lurking, and even experienced chatters watch from the sidelines on those occasions when they are unfamiliar with a topic or cannot devote their full attention to a chat.

Don't be shy about introducing yourself at the beginning of a chat, though. Announcing that this is your first time in a particular chat or that you prefer to lurk is perfectly acceptable. Just don't be surprised when you are greeted with open arms and encouraged to join in.

Another way to begin slowly is to simply like or retweet others' chat responses to show support and to validate the ideas that resonate with you. The next step is to start commenting on others' responses. Think of this as a relaxed, respectful conversation between colleagues.

Feel free to also follow those chat participants who you admire. They may not follow you back immediately, but once you establish your presence in this community, others will eventually include you as a member of their PLN. Keep in mind that it's not the quantity of followers one has but the quality that matters.

Making Meaningful Contributions

Once ready, you can fully join the discussion. Whenever you have something to say, add your own answers to the current chat question and see which ones get reactions. You don't have to be an expert to participate. As a co-learner, your personal experiences, ideas, and opinions are just as valid as anyone else's. There is also room for a range of responses, including levity, venting, questioning, and courteous debate—all synthesized into 140-character bursts.

If you strive to be an educational leader and to insightfully distinguish yourself, one suggestion is to avoid the obvious or trite in your responses. You need not answer every chat question, so try waiting until you have something impassioned or pithy to add. Focus on moving the conversation forward or deeper rather than merely repeating what most have already said.

If you do so, you'll be viewed as a particularly valued part of the discussion. In time, you likely will also garner more friends than mere followers and may receive weekly personal invitations to participate in certain chats, a sure sign you have found your PLN—and that they have found you.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Ward (<http://www.edutopia.org/users/robert-ward>)

Robert Ward is an enthusiastic educator, author, and champion for children.

@RewardingEdu (<https://twitter.com/RewardingEdu>)

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