

A Connected Educator's Journey

What a difference a year makes.

This was my mantra during the 2014 NAESP Annual Conference in Nashville this July. I have been fortunate to attend two wonderful NAESP conferences, but this year, my experience was much different. How, you ask? Now, I am a Connected Educator—and that has been game-changing.

Getting Started

In July 2013, I came to Baltimore to experience my first NAESP conference, and I happened upon the Social Media Lounge. As someone who had never been on Facebook and had always been warned about the “dangers” of social media, I was more than a bit wary of the Twitter 101 presentation given by Joe Mazza (@Joe_Mazza), Tony Sinanis (@TonySinanis), and Vicki Day (@VictoriaL_Day).

At first, I was just surface listening. But, as the team discussed how they use Twitter for professional development and school public relations, I found myself listening more intently. Sinanis patiently worked with me to set up my first Twitter account. Within minutes, I had an account, added a picture (integral to gaining followers), and began typing my bio.

But I was still apprehensive. Before that day, all I knew about Twitter was that somehow hashtags were involved and that celebrities used it to post selfies and rant. I had more questions than answers. I asked myself: What's the connection between professional development and Twitter? How am I going to find time in my busy day to tweet? Is it appropriate for principals to tweet? How can this make me a better leader or learner?

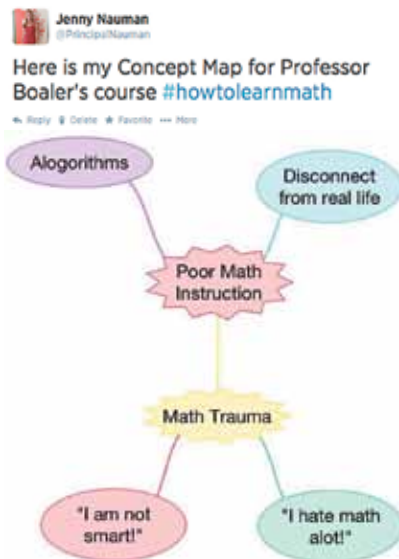
That very same day, Todd Whitaker (@ToddWhitaker) gave a keynote presentation at the conference. He discussed the power of Twitter and advised every educator to use social media to learn from others.

A Week Later

With some additional encouragement

from one of my colleagues, Kristin Gray (@MathMinds), I began to lurk. (No, this isn't randomly stalking people. It's observing what happens on Twitter, but not actively sending messages.) I began to learn how Twitter works, follow chats, and find people to follow.

About a week after the conference, I sent my first tweet. It certainly didn't set the world on fire, but at least it was academic!



Continuing the Journey

After my initial tweet, I jumped in with both feet and continued my journey. I haven't looked back since. The steps I took included:

- **Establishing a PLN.** Your PLN, or personal/professional learning network, are the set of people you follow and the people who follow you on Twitter. To establish mine, I searched to find like-minded people, mostly educators, from

whom I could learn and with whom I could collaborate. I started by following the team that trained me on Twitter, colleagues, and some of my favorite authors. From there, I found people to follow on chats, at conferences, and using Twitter's "People to Follow" suggestions.

- **Participating in chats.** Chats are Twitter discussions where moderators pose questions and participants following the hashtag can respond. I regularly participate in chats; my favorite is #satchat on Saturday mornings at 7:30 a.m. (Eastern). I particularly like chats because they challenge my thinking. During them, I constantly look for ideas to make my school better. Use this Twitter chat schedule to find education chats of interest to you:

<http://goo.gl/eM1Yh>.

- **Writing and reading blogs.** Many members of my PLN blog regularly to express their views, reflect, and provide information for their staffs. Despite my initial reservations, I'm giving blogging a try. So far, my posts have been about diverse learners and eliminating stress about things that cannot be controlled (read them at naumannotions.wordpress.com). Although I am only two posts in, I enjoy expressing myself and hearing the opinions of others.
- **Discovering new ideas.** By connecting with other educators throughout the nation and the world, I have encountered many new and exciting ideas. Every day, I "favorite" an awesome idea, inspiring quote, or reminder about great instruction that can help me improve as a leader.

One idea that I recently "borrowed" is Peter DeWitt's (@PeterM DeWitt) flipped leadership concept. DeWitt regularly "flips" communication by presenting information in a video format prior to a meeting with parents and staff. I took his lead and created a video prior to our open house for parents. I have also "flipped" a majority of our staff meetings for the year. (View these

flipped videos at [youtube.com/user/JennyNauman](https://www.youtube.com/user/JennyNauman).)

I also learned how to create an app for my school. Through School Info app, I created the Shields Elementary app, where I can push information to parents' cell phones or tablets. This has been a very effective way of communicating with our school community.

■ **Giving presentations.** Since becoming a “tweep,” I really like to talk about connecting on Twitter. I have given numerous presentations about the power of Twitter, including presenting in my own district to about 100 teachers and administrators and to aspiring administrators in my state.

In November 2013, I presented at the National Blue Ribbon ceremony in Washington, D.C., with Sean Bevan (@WestwoodHS). At this year's NAESP Annual Conference, I was honored to serve as a Social Media Ambassador, presenting Twitter 101 and 201 sessions with @VictoriaL_Day in the Social Media Lounge. Sharing what I have learned about and through Twitter has been very rewarding.



What's Next?

As my connected learning journey has taught me, anything is possible with the support of a PLN. Twitter has opened doors and my mind in ways I never thought possible a year ago. I have learned, reflected, connected, taught, shared, and borrowed. Log onto Twitter and learn with me! I am @PrincipalNauman. 📧

Jenny Nauman is principal of Shields Elementary School in Lewes, Delaware.



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