Could Twitter be a tool for improving schools?

July 26 2019, by Amanda Nelson

Jayson W. Richardson. Credit: University of Kentucky

Twitter has become a tool for school administrators to more efficiently and effectively lead schools, according to a new study.

Researchers at the University of Kentucky College of Education collected results from studies showing the ways school leaders engage with Twitter. They then analyzed how Twitter usage can impact leaders' ability to make a difference at their schools through the lens of the professional standards for educational leaders. The standards, devised by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, are designed to ensure educational leaders are ready to meet the challenges of the job today and in the future.

The analysis was authored by Jayson W. Richardson, an associate professor in the UK College of Education Department of Educational Leadership Studies. Co-authors were Nick Sauers, an associate professor at Georgia State University; Vincent Cho, an associate professor at Boston College; and John Eric Novosel-Lingat, a doctoral student at UK. Their findings will appear in a book, "The Role of Knowledge Brokers in Education: Connecting the Dots Between Research and Practice," to be released by Routledge on Aug. 16.

"Whether it is finding a dinner venue, a job or devising a classroom lesson plan, we all turn to the web for advice," Richardson said. "Social media is conducive to giving school leaders a place to build community, increase professional capacity, and learn collaboratively. It's an ideal time for us to better understand how mobilizing knowledge via Twitter and other social media platforms can result in positive outcomes for teachers and for students."

For instance, the authors wrote, a principal who might be dissatisfied with her school's discipline practices could ask Twitter peers for advice, learn about hashtags devoted to restorative justice or positive behavioral interventions, and then engage in debates or organized chats about that topic.

This is done all while reading, tweeting, and retweeting knowledge about

the topic and finding new pools of experts or colleagues who might be knowledgeable about such matters.

The analysis showed K-12 leaders use Twitter to build community, increase professional capacity, foster their own professional learning, learn collaboratively, and more by:

- brokering knowledge. Through Twitter, leaders have access to a broad pool of experts and expertise on cutting edge practices, all in real time. Through link sharing and direct requests, they share resources and gather information about educational practices, reforms, research and instructional innovations. The web-based exchange can have an energizing effect on schools and classrooms.
- developing a sense of community. Often, leaders do not have a peer colleague to engage with for support or demonstrate their vulnerability. With the capabilities of real-time interactions on Twitter, communities of practice form online and this access to the wisdom of others can help leaders garner and organize school resources, embody professional values, and handle the stresses of their positions.
- connecting with academic researchers. The practice of translation between academic research and practice can be conveniently facilitated.
- opening conversations beyond traditional education audiences. This boundary crossing can help eliminate the void in communication that often happens between different communities. Talking via Twitter can enhance collaboration between local organizations that would otherwise function in isolation.

Provided by University of Kentucky