

## MirandaNet Fellowship Application

# Global networking using social media

During 2014 I started two networks for educators. They both aim to allow educators at any phase to communicate and share ideas and resources with others who belong to the network. The networks are both based around Twitter accounts. Each is free and the network is run by myself in a facilitator role. I am submitting this to MirandaNet as the success of both networks model how individual educators can add to their knowledge on a global scale. However, this networking tends to be done outside school hours and therefore requires a time commitment on the part of participants.

## How a twitter network has been setup

Twitter is a micro-blogging site where messages are limited to 140 characters per message. Messages may include images, videos or any other form of web link. To be able to see someone else's "tweets" (messages) you need to look at their account and their tweet record, or "follow" their account. This means that all of their tweets are seen by your account. In theory this makes it easy to follow messages from a particular account. However, many individuals on Twitter may follow hundreds or thousands of accounts. This means that your "timeline" reflects recent tweets and a time stamp indicates how long ago the tweet was sent.

The two accounts covered by this piece are run in different ways:

Account 1: @globalsolo

This account does not follow any other accounts. When messages are directed to it by including @globalsolo they are read and where considered to be suitable for sharing they are then "retweeted (RT)" which means they are shared with the network followers. This model is based on the the network account being used as a facilitator to share ideas and suggest connections.

Account 2: @gasigict

This account follows many others including a range of newsfeeds. On most days a number of tweets and news stories are RTed. Messages are then shared and responded to. This operates like an individual twitter account.

## Why were these accounts specifically set up?

Each of the two accounts were set up in line with specific interests on my part. In this section I will discuss the background behind each account and how they link to other external professional development work that I am involved with.

Account 1: @globalsolo

In May 2012 I first came across Solo taxonomy through a number of conversations on Twitter. I sought a simple framework I could use with students to understand how to develop their answers in more detail, especially in written form. The structure of this taxonomy was much easier to communicate than previous work using Blooms taxonomy in my experience. I went through a period of discovery through 2012 and developed practice. I shared my ideas with others through the hashtag #soloarmy. Several geographers were involved in discussions, these included a chat that spanned the UK, Australia, Abu Dhabi and the USA one Saturday. We shared our findings with classes through personal blogs. My posts can be found under: <https://mishmashlearning.wordpress.com/category/solo/page/6/>

My posts trace my practice, developing understanding and resources that I used and shared. As well as blogging about its use I also took up the mantle of promoting it at teaching events. I presented through Teachmeets, some of which were recorded, not always clearly, depending on the venue and other factors. These included TMEssex Nov. 2012 (no video record to the relief of my "volunteers"), PedagooLondon TM Mar 2013 ( [http://youtu.be/l8\\_gG7-7cnc](http://youtu.be/l8_gG7-7cnc) ). In April 2013 with Alice Leung, a science teacher from Sydney, Australia, I organised sologlobalchat – a one hour twitter chat run from my car (it's a long story) involving 40 teachers mainly from the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

Alice wrote the clearest post after the event at <http://aliceleung.net/2013/04/14/lessons-from-sologlobalchat/> . Our intention was to develop a global link to encourage more collaboration and sharing of ideas across international boundaries.

In June 2013 as part of the Blogsync initiative led by Chris Waugh I edited a previous post to produce <https://mishmashlearning.wordpress.com/2013/06/29/june-blogsync-an-example-of-a-great-classroom-explanation-httpblogsinc-edutronic-net/> .

By September 2013, further reading had led me to investigate the critique ideas from Ron Berger and I looked at developing an approach which encompassed solo taxonomy and Berger's Ethic of Excellence. I shared this as a project to TMCollaborate at Canons High School that term ( <http://youtu.be/fSx-nNxjOcE> ). Later in the term an invite to TMSurrey proved too far to travel so I made a video to share the idea how anything could be studied using the solo taxonomy approach. The video is on YouTube. I certainly used a rainy day to record it and launched "Garden Shed productions" with Guess my Hobby ( <http://youtu.be/fSx-nNxjOcE> ).

I was increasingly being asked how might solo taxonomy be used in other subjects so I invited teachers to email me a lesson topic and I would suggest a sequenced lesson which would demonstrate each of the stages of the taxonomy.

Finally, I realised that the logical follow up to solo global chat would be a network to bring together practitioners and interested educators but without geographical, curriculum subject or education phase boundaries. I put the idea to Pam Hook, the key author of resources from New Zealand ([www.Pamhook.com](http://www.Pamhook.com)). I also contacted John Biggs one of the two original authors of Solo Taxonomy. Both were happy with the idea, and so @globalsolo was launched on 31.12.2014.

I continue to advocate the use of Solo taxonomy and am recognised as one of its UK evangelists.

Account 2: @gasigict

I belong to The Geographical Association which is one of two main subject organisations within England. I am one of a group of volunteers who sit on the Special Interest group for ICT. We meet three times per year and share ideas and resources, some of this is posted through the association's website ([www.geography.org.uk](http://www.geography.org.uk) ). After presenting a workshop at the 2014 Easter conference and having many discussions with conference delegates about accessing and identifying resources, especially for new teachers and for experienced staff who came to the use of ICT later in their careers. It became clear that our group might expand its profile by having a social media presence and enable sharing of resources.

In May 2015 I set up the Twitter account and a linked blog to see how this idea would work. Eight months on the twitter account has attracted just under 1000 followers who come from across the world. The account shares app ideas, news stories, weblinks links and ideas between educators, people interested in geography and some companies involved in linked work.

## **The impact of running these groups on my learning network**

I have been teaching for 26.5 years. In my early years in the profession Professional Development was mainly through external course run by the Local Authority or External Providers. Networking between schools varied and for some periods of time were encouraged then discouraged linked to the funding and political agenda at the time.

Most links made were therefore local to your school. Subject associations in some subjects offered a wider range of individuals to be in contact with but through postal mail then email this was fairly limited. With the development of communication technology, handheld devices and social media the world suddenly appears smaller and far more accessible.

I now regularly (most weeks) take part in at least one #edchat (an education chat with preset focus), usually through Twitter in my case. These increasingly are ones hosted in the Southern Hemisphere, an area I have never physically been to, on a different time zone entirely. Through the use of blogging, Twitter and apps like Voxer I can communicate with educators with a breadth of experience I could not connect with previously.

My PLN – Personal or Professional Learning Network is truly global. I learn about educational change, pedagogies, resources, theories and issues from many other situations that parallel my own experience in the UK.

An aspect I most enjoy about these chats are that in the majority of cases is that individuals are not set in any pecking order and are "just" people contributing to a topic. Out of these chats links are developed when you find people with whom you have more to discuss. I consider this is the greatest personal and professional development opportunity I have used. Financially it is limited by my tech / broadband access. Time is the true cost but as a professional I am interested in tuning my own experience and it allows me to bring up to date resources and information into my lessons and interactions with colleagues who themselves may come from a range of national backgrounds. My current department has already included UK, Irish, Australian and Canadian teachers.

## **How could this model be used by other teaching professionals**

Social media and any one route is never going to be accessed by all teaching staff, however it shows how technology can enhance professional development. It has to be an individual choice unless it is provided within the timing of in-house CPD sessions.

Awareness of these techniques vary, like events like Teachmeets – the minority who participate become entwined. So I will follow tweeters who blog, attend the same free educational conferences and know about their work and/or publications while colleagues not connected as I am will rarely come across these resources unless led to them by a connected leader or colleague.

My concluding question is: if connecting is so beneficial, why do we not encourage more of it?

As an application for fellowship of MirandaNet I am not offering a unique experience or new idea. I am a connected educator, I talk to others about it, I encourage and for that reason believe I would be a good Fellow.

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