

THE VOICE OF THE UNION

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## Educators and unions harness power of online social media tools

**AT FIRST GLANCE**, it's hard to tell teacher-librarian Anna Koval from the students she works with at Casa Grande High School. The Petaluma Federation of Teachers member is bubbly, fashionable and welcoming toward the students and staff who stream into the library. But it soon becomes clear who is in charge.

The inviting library, decorated with Koval's personal touch, functions like a well-oiled machine. Central to its operation is [bighouselibrary.com](http://bighouselibrary.com), a Web site Koval set up to involve students and teachers. With a calendar, catalog, teachers' assignments, book club section, and blog, the site is where students go to get and complete their classroom assignments during scheduled library time. She uses Twitter to promote her school's library and to broadcast activities and information the students and teachers need to know about.

Twitter is an online community-

**"If I've written a blog post about new materials in the library, or an upcoming activity, I'll make a summary 'tweet' with a link to the relevant post."**

— Anna Koval, Librarian, Casa Grande High School, Petaluma

building tool that allows you to share information with your "followers" in text-based posts called "tweets," which can be no longer than 140 characters.

Koval describes Twitter as "the *TV Guide* summary of what's going on and coming up." She integrates Twitter with the Web site to quickly draw people to important, but more detailed information. For example, "If I've written a blog post about new materials in the library, or an upcoming activity, I'll make a summary 'tweet' with a link to the relevant post."

Los Angeles College Faculty Guild member Amara Aguilar uses social



Petaluma librarian Anna Koval maintains a catalog, teacher assignments, book club and blog on [bighouselibrary.com](http://bighouselibrary.com). She "tweets" new activities and information to students and teachers.

media in her teaching, but prefers Facebook, where users grow their network by "friending" others with whom they share.

As an assistant professor of multimedia and journalism at Pierce College, Aguilar posts resources to aid her students in their journalism careers. "Facebook also helps me keep up with former students and how they're doing in the industry."

Both Koval and Aguilar agree one of the greatest benefits of social media is the ability to share resources and collaborate with peers they've never met. Despite the great benefits, they warn others that as with all online communication, you need to keep it professional, especially when in contact with students. Anything on the Internet is public.

**CFT LOCAL UNIONS** are beginning to embrace social media for union-building and communications. In March, United Teachers Los Angeles used Twitter to deliver quick messages about the union protest of teacher layoffs to let members who couldn't attend know what was happening immediately. UTLA tweets breaking news and school board votes, links to its Web site and articles from its newspaper — communicating the union's point of view to a growing number of followers.

The challenge of communicating in 140-or-fewer characters has

not daunted the man behind UTLA's tweets, communications specialist Chris Ryder. UTLA's tweets at [twitter.com/utla2009](http://twitter.com/utla2009) often read like a suspenseful play-by-play radio drama. They allow followers to feel a part of the action, sometimes linking to photos posted on [twitpic.com](http://twitpic.com).

In the Monterey Bay region, elementary teacher and executive board member Sarah Henne recently set up the Facebook page *PVUSD Educators* for the Pajaro Valley Federation. "The idea was to create a network," explains local president Francisco Rodriguez, "not just for our members, but for the outside community." The local sees Facebook as an effective medium for commenting on issues and school board actions.

Similarly, the Cerritos College Federation in southeast Los Angeles County made a Facebook page (*Cerritos College Faculty Federation*) in August to inform the public and students about faculty issues on campus. Though still in its nascent stage, the local hopes to link relevant articles, and upload pictures and video clips of events, according to Philip Hu, the local's COPE director.

Hu describes how Facebook shares information as a "huge, exponential explosion." You have a group of "friends" who have "friends" and your information goes to those friends of friends — who may be constituents in your district. This, he believes, may help when the union wants to elect friendly trustees to the board.

— By Mindy Pines, CFT Reporter

### Educators and online safety

**Though modern technology and the Internet** make it easier for educators to research, communicate, study and collaborate, there are problems and dangers associated with this technology. Both students and teachers may be vulnerable to invasions of privacy.

The AFT booklet *Classroom Tips: Appropriate Uses of Modern Technology* offers educators tips for minimizing risk to their professional careers and for teaching students about online safety. It offers instructions for maximizing privacy on Facebook and MySpace, and warns educators about the potential for students to cheat when using cellphones, iPods, and other electronic devices.

>You can download the booklet at [tiny.cc/AFT\\_technology](http://tiny.cc/AFT_technology)