

CHAPTER 14

SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE FYC CLASS: THE NEW DIGITAL DIVIDE

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In the spring 2015 semester, I was teaching a second-semester writing course focused on the rhetoric and culture of social media. In one class, students were asked to tweet their initial analysis of a chapter by danah boyd (2014). In order to protect both my and students' privacy while using Twitter, I created the hashtag #eng112GB (the course code, number, and section). By creating this hashtag, neither students nor I had to follow each other. Students got in groups, discussed the assigned chapter, and tweeted to the designated hashtag as seen in Figure 14.1. After they finished tweeting, I pulled up the Twitter feed on the screen as a springboard for a whole-class discussion of the chapter.

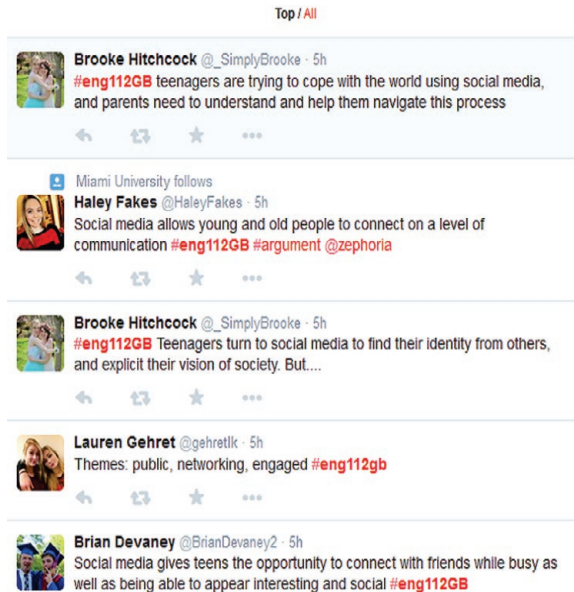


Figure 14.1: Students' Tweets to a Designated Hashtag.

Meanwhile, at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, another English professor, Ann N. Amicucci, created a Facebook page for her 400-level

course on social media. As demonstrated in Figure 14.2, the description of the page states that Facebook is serving “as a public forum for communication” (Social Media 4880, 2015). Both the professor and students post photos, concepts, and ideas for class discussion.

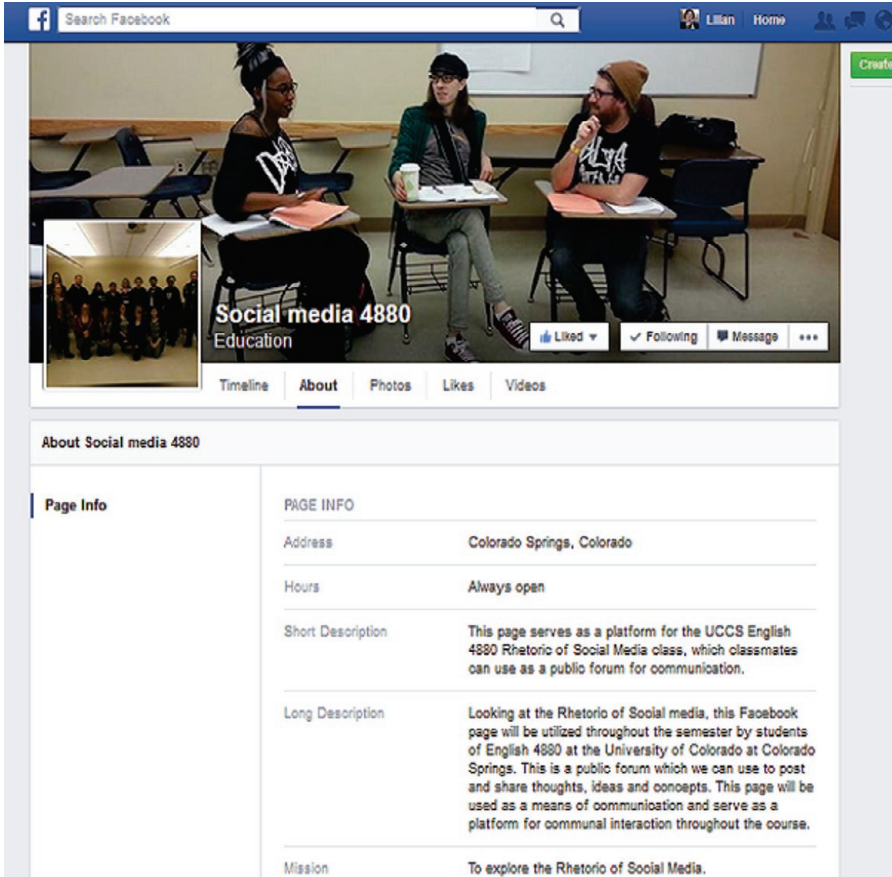


Figure 14.2: The Description of a Facebook Page Used in a Writing Class.

These two activities are examples of writing teachers’ genuine interest in using various social media sites in their classes. One characteristic of social media is the possibility of producing content easily. That being the case, using social media in the writing class allows students to use a variety of modes to create content to be shared with others. Through this process, students become participants in the creation and flow of knowledge instead of being merely recipients of it (Rodriguez, 2011). For example, students in my class created the points of interest that they wanted to focus on in our class discussion of boyd’s chapter. Similarly, students in Professor Amicucci’s class contributed to the course ma-

terials through sharing relevant materials that they found interesting and worth sharing and discussing. According to Leah Donlan (2012), participation and students' "sense of control" (p. 4) are basic keys to the success of using social media in academic discourses. Therefore, using social media can create a paradigm shift in student learning in the writing class. But how do the examples from my and Ann Amicucci's classes represent or fail to represent other writing teachers' use of social media in their classes?

My goal in this chapter is to answer this question by discussing the findings of a critical study that examined writing teachers' pedagogical uses of three social media platforms: a social network site (Facebook), a microblogging site (Twitter), and a content-sharing community (YouTube) in the first-year composition (FYC) classroom. Findings reveal that social media sites were used to achieve a number of pedagogical purposes, such as helping students understand rhetorical choices and fostering community building and student engagement. However, participants appeared to prefer alphabetic texts to multimodal ones, and to dedicate more class time and attention to analysis rather than production activities on social media sites. These findings mean that while the ways Ann Amicucci and I used social media in our classes may not be unique, they are not necessarily mainstream practices.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN WRITING STUDIES

Writing scholars showed a relatively early interest in studying various social media platforms (e.g., Vie, 2008; Williams, 2008). Ever since, social media has continued to inspire writing scholars to explore its different features and affordances for the writing class. However, the volume of published scholarship on the use of social media in the writing class has not reflected that interest. A number of scholars have reported on the uses of social media in writing classes (Childs, 2013; McWilliams, Hickey, Hines, Conner, & Bishop, 2011; Reid, 2011), by college students (Buck, 2012), and by multilingual students (Maranto & Barton, 2010). This body of scholarship was significant for introducing writing teachers, and writing studies in general, to the emerging technologies of social media sites.

In most scholarship published on the use of social media in the writing class, scholars sketched their own experiences with integrating a single social media platform in their respective writing classes. That is, they usually gave readers an idea about one precise activity performed on a solo platform, often with rich description of the outcomes of that activity as evidence that the platform had potentials for teaching writing. While beneficial for their rich detail, accounts of informal research of using social media platforms in teaching writing are limited

in their ability to draw a comprehensive picture of the use of social media in the college writing classroom. What is more, informal research does not provide adequate evidence that would prompt writing studies as a field to make any comprehensive conclusions or recommendations about the value of social media in the writing class.

This lack of data-driven research on social media in the writing class can be attributed to two factors. The first factor is the nature of empirical large-scale research, which requires extended time to design a study, collect and analyze data, test hypotheses, and compare findings against previous research to make novel conclusions. This long process conflicts with the very nature of social media development and innovation. Social media platforms develop and change so rapidly that scholars may find it frustrating to design an empirical study that would take months to finish only to realize that the feature they have studied has become obsolete, been discontinued, or been replaced with a more recent and updated feature. The other factor may be the paradigm shift that steered research in writing studies towards more ethnographic and case study research in the past 30 years. However, observations on current research in computers and composition (Mina, 2013) and recent empirical research (see Anson's and Faris' chapters in this volume) confirm that digital media and social media scholars are enriching writing studies steadily with more empirical large-scale studies.

Among the few large-scale studies was Stephanie Vie's (2008), an empirical examination of the personal experiences of 127 instructors and 354 students who used two social networking sites, MySpace and Facebook. Vie's purpose was to examine the digital divide between the new generation of students and the older generation of teachers. The majority of teachers responded to her survey saying that they did not use either site because most of them thought these sites were designed primarily for students, and thus abstained from using them. Based on these findings, Vie concluded that many teachers oppose the use of social networking sites in their classes because they perceive it as a threat to the hierarchy of power and authority in the classroom. Gina Maranto and Matt Barton (2010) supported Vie's conclusion, claiming that teachers believed they compromised their credibility with their students if they were socially connected with them on social media sites.

Vie's (2008) concept of the digital divide between teachers and students is not the only problem that happens when teachers ban social media sites from their arsenal of pedagogical choices. Amber Buck (2012) complicated that divide by arguing that this ban does not allow writing teachers to see social media sites as rhetorical spaces whose affordances could contribute to students' rhetorical maturity. After tracing an undergraduate student's practices on social networking sites for two semesters, Buck found that the student developed "so-

phisticated rhetorical and literacy skills” (p. 36) during that time. Although Buck’s study did not examine teachers’ pedagogical choices of social media in the writing class, her findings and conclusions suggested that students’ academic and non-academic skills are not separate; on the contrary, they are connected and influence each other. Thus, Buck urged writing teachers to abandon the binary vision that may be the reason behind either the total lack of or the limited integration of social media sites in the writing class.

Similarly, and arguing from a more rhetorical perspective, Maranto and Barton (2010) viewed social networking sites as “vibrant rhetorical spaces” (p. 37) where students make rhetorical choices all the time. Maranto and Barton advocated for using social networking sites as spaces to teach students about identity, social engagement, and community building. They supported their position with two students’ experiences of getting engaged in national and international civic movements through Facebook interactions. As Maranto and Barton acknowledged teachers’ concerns about privacy and authority, they encouraged teachers to claim a middle ground between completely banning social media and mandating students to “friend” them on social media sites.

Whether or not writing teachers have responded to Maranto and Barton’s (2010) or Buck’s (2012) suggestions to use social media in the writing class has not been formally examined. In order to narrow this wide gap in writing studies and gain a clearer picture of the position of social media in the FYC classroom, I conducted this study.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study came from a larger mixed-method study that explored how writing teachers used new media technologies in teaching first-year composition (FYC) classes. A total of 161 participants from a wide range of higher education institutions in the United States completed an online survey that I distributed to subscribers of a number of listservs for writing teachers: Writing Program Administrators List (WPA-L), TechRhet, and Writing Program Administrators–Graduate Organization (WPA-GO). The survey consisted mainly of closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The first closed-ended question asked participants to check all new media technologies they required their FYC students to use to complete coursework. As the focus of the study was exclusively pedagogical, I did not want teachers to discuss new media technologies used in preparing or managing their work (e.g., creating a video to introduce the course to students); I wanted the focus to be entirely on students and writing in FYC classes. The list included the three most popular social media platforms at that time (early 2013): YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. However,

and in order to capture all possible technologies teachers may have used, I added an “other” option for teachers to report their choice of technologies not included in the list. Although teachers added a number of technologies to that list in their answers, no other social media platforms were added. Thus, the analysis of social media reported in this study is constrained to YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. In addition to the numerical data yielded from answers to that closed-ended question, I used verbal data from teachers’ narrative responses to an open-ended question about purposes, reasons, and activities for using social media in teaching writing.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, numerical data came from answers to closed-ended questions. These numbers were used to run descriptive statistical tests of frequency and percentages that were important to identify the commonly used social-media platforms and the frequent uses of each platform in teaching FYC (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Srnka & Koeszegi, 2007).

Verbal data in this study came from answers to the open-ended question on the survey, and I used an inductive approach to analyzing these data. Qualitative content analysis of verbal data helps unpack the thematic patterns in written texts (Creswell, 2014). The goal of the content analysis was to gain a richer understanding of first-year composition teachers’ uses of social media platforms in their classes.

DATA CODING AND CATEGORIZATION.

According to most authors (Creswell, 2014; Marshal & Rossman, 2011; Stake, 2010), qualitative analysis starts with two fundamental steps: data coding and data categorization. Katherine J. Srnka and Sabine T. Koeszegi (2007) recommended reading all of the data prior to developing codes. For this study, I read teachers’ responses to the open-ended question in the survey thoroughly. During that process, I took notes and recorded initial thoughts and possible themes regarding the uses of these technologies. This helped me capture all possible themes and identify iterative ones. Srnka and Koeszegi also recommended the use of *thought units* or units of meaning as the basic unit for data coding. Thought units “comprise one idea communicated, no matter whether it is expressed in a sentence, a verb object sequence, a single word” (Srnka & Koeszegi, 2007, p. 36). This concept was adopted for the analysis of verbal data in this study. Applying this theoretical idea to data, the unit of analysis was a different use of the stated technology within the same participant’s response. For example,

one participant wrote, “I use Facebook to have students learn how to understand and examine the importance of audience. I also use Facebook to teach the difference between summary and analysis.” This response contains two different uses of Facebook. Thus, this participant’s response contained two thought units, each of which received its own code.

DATA CODING VALIDATION.

To validate data coding, and consequently findings, I asked a research assistant to analyze 10 percent of the data (Creswell, 2002; Srnka & Koeszegi, 2007). Twenty random responses totaling 978 words were selected and copied to two separate files for data coding validation. I shared the coding scheme with the research assistant and we agreed on a method of coding. After three rounds of validation, I calculated the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson’s r) to obtain inter-coder reliability (Gall et al., 2007). We reached a high level of inter-coder reliability of $r = 0.779$, which meant the coding scheme was valid to code the complete set of data.

SOCIAL MEDIA USES IN THE FYC CLASSROOM

Numerical analysis of data showed that 98 (59.7%), 27 (16.4%), and 21 (12.8%) participating teachers used YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, respectively, in their classes. According to one participant, YouTube videos are easily available and accessible to all students. This availability may account for the relatively high percentage of teachers reporting using YouTube videos in their writing classes. As for Facebook, the assumption that Facebook is “used by virtually all students,” as one participant put it, may have encouraged participants to design activities that utilize the affordances of Facebook in teaching writing. On the other side, and in accord with other research findings (e.g., Lin, Hoffman, & Borengasser, 2013), Twitter seems to be less favorable compared to other social media sites. The fact that Twitter is a more public platform with less user control over content sharing and more concerns about privacy may have contributed to making Twitter the least used social media site among participants in this study.

After inductive analysis of verbal data, there were two approaches to thematically group and present findings: by social media platform or by the pedagogical uses of the various platforms. After contemplating both options, I chose the second approach because the goal of this study was to gain insight into writing teachers’ current practices pertaining to the use of social media in teaching writing. Therefore, I decided to categorize findings by the pedagogical purpose

of using various social media platforms in the writing class because I wanted to privilege pedagogy over technologies.

Although Facebook and Twitter are generally known for their heavy use of multimedia, they were used more as text-rich technologies, or technologies that are used to produce alphabetical text in digital spaces. Not surprisingly, YouTube was mainly used as a media-rich technology, technology that requires the incorporation of different modes of expression (e.g., images and sound). The three sites were reportedly used to achieve the following pedagogical purposes: helping students understand rhetorical choices, enhancing learners' analytical and reflective thinking skills, developing student writing skills, and building communities and student engagement. In the coming sections, I zoom in on these themes in order to unpack participants' use of the three social media sites in teaching FYC classes.

HELPING STUDENTS UNDERSTAND RHETORICAL CHOICES

Participants described how they used social media as a form of visual rhetoric and multimodality in order to help students develop a better understanding of rhetorical choices across modalities. Among the activities participants reported was one of creating a profile page on Facebook "that represented their intellectual and scholarly identity." The teacher asked students to create that page using images, videos, links to articles, and music and songs that enabled them to represent their identity as students and their scholarly activities. Such an activity is expected to encourage students to consider the variety of rhetorical choices available in order to best represent themselves professionally in the virtual space of a social networking site.

Interwoven with the important purpose of considering rhetorical choices is the need to understand audience awareness, the sensitivity the writer develops for real and possible readers of their writing. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford (1984) referred to these as invoked and addressed audiences, respectively. When using the term audience, I mean to suggest a group of readers that is not limited to teachers and students, but also includes the many unseen readers addressed when multimodal texts are circulated widely via social media sites. One participating teacher asked students to design an advocacy film on a given civic or political issue. The teacher told students "that the film should attempt to persuade a specific audience and have a specific purpose." Although that teacher did not provide further details about that project, it can be assumed that the purpose of creating advocacy videos was for students to learn how to make informed rhetorical choices with the aim of persuading their target audience. In an earlier study, Abby Dubisar and Jason Palmeri (2010) concluded that political remix

videos enable students to employ their own thoughts and beliefs to reach larger audiences. This conclusion can be extended to advocacy films students created and distributed through their social media accounts.

This multimodal approach to enhancing students' understanding of rhetorical choices seems to tap into students' everyday use of multimedia to achieve this crucial goal in the writing class where social media platforms were also used to build critical thinking skills as well.

ENHANCING LEARNERS ANALYTICAL AND REFLECTIVE THINKING SKILLS

The desire to develop students' skills in argument, analysis, and critique predominates in writing classes. One can hardly read a scholarly work or engage in an academic discussion without building critical thinking and rhetorical skills, a core purpose that teachers strive to develop and strengthen. The writing teachers who participated in this study displayed great loyalty and commitment to achieving these essential goals. They mainly referred to the various activities they designed for social media platforms.

One participant asked students to read and analyze comments on a YouTube video. The teacher chose a video that triggered a myriad of comments and asked students to read through the comments and categorize them thematically. I consider this an exciting, authentic analysis of information on the web. This activity corresponds to Alexander Fedorov's (2010) recommendation that students should become critically aware of the information delivered through media. Engaging in the informal practice of reading comments on YouTube videos is an example of how social media sites can be convenient spaces to "blend formal and informal learning experiences" (Donlan, 2012, p. 3). This blend can develop students' analytical and research skills because categorizing findings around themes is an essential skill in inquiry-based writing courses.

Participants also showed a preference for integrating videos into a variety of analytical activities. One teacher, for example, chose YouTube videos and asked students to analyze the arguments in the videos. Another teacher seemed to have extended this activity to include a production component. In their response, this teacher communicated that they started the semester by asking students to analyze traditional typographical texts before they were required to use visual rhetoric as an alternative way to construct the same argument in videos near the end of the semester. Erik Ellis (2013) proposed that composition teachers should teach students the basics of visual analysis before teaching them to compose a multimodal text. Ellis' suggestion parallels the traditional approach to textual analysis in our classes in which teachers usually start by teaching students to analyze written texts before asking them to compose one. That participant's

reported activity is an effective application of Ellis' approach and an extension of traditional analysis and production activities in the writing class into the new territories of multimodality utilizing a social media platform such as YouTube.

Many of the reflective thinking activities reported by participating teachers concentrated on behaviors and practices related to the use of social media platforms. In other words, the class activities that teachers created to facilitate and promote critical thinking focused more on students and their social-media-related behavior, particularly on the social networking site Facebook. These activities, which I discuss below, appear to build on students' everyday practices and their uses of social media as a means of situating their media experience "within an academic context centering on rhetorical activities" (Journet, 2007, p. 116).

In the first activity, one participant said they used Facebook writing practices as a springboard to let students see their social media behavior as writing, and to reflect on this type of writing rhetorically. The teacher's rationale for that activity was to demonstrate to students how writing is part and parcel of their lives even if they do not recognize social media as a platform for writing or their activities on those platforms as writing. This activity seems to aim at developing critical literacy as Stuart Selber (2004) defined it. Selber argued that critical literacy starts with understanding one's current beliefs and practices before attempting to critique and challenge them. This is what that teacher seemed to have accomplished through the Facebook writing analysis activity.

A second activity comes from another participant who utilized Twitter to teach students about networked learning. The teacher tried to situate students' writing on Twitter within a larger discourse of crowdsourcing. The teacher noted that they wanted students to see "how knowledge is crowd-sourced amongst open networks of individuals who are trying to share ideas." Jennifer A. Hudson (2007) contended that the main purpose for using technologies is to promote dialogic thinking. This participant apparently wanted students to engage in dialogic thinking by expanding their conversation beyond their individual tweets and to the larger picture of dialogue among individuals who share ideas and engage in a reciprocal thinking process.

These multimedia-rich activities (as few as they actually are), the rationale behind them, and their perceived value to the development of reflective and critical thinking magnify the role of widespread and available social media sites in teaching critical thinking skills to undergraduate students. These teachers' reports indicate how multimodal work on social media platforms can be geared towards achieving sophisticated rhetorical purposes by drawing students' attention to the affordances of other media and to their choices in various rhetorical situations. Moreover, social media sites may also be used to improve students' traditional writing skills.

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS

Because this study examined the uses of three social media platforms in FYC classes, it was not surprising to find that text production was a major goal among participating teachers. The texts teachers described in their answers included primarily alphabetic texts (i.e., texts that are solely print texts even if produced and disseminated in a digital space).

Twitter was used for enhancing students' academic writing skills. Twitter's restriction of limiting text to 140 characters per tweet seems to have encouraged teachers to use the site to develop "more focused writing skills," as one teacher claimed. According to several participants, these skills included "writing with brevity and clarity" and "writing tightly and concisely." With the goal of improving students' writing skills in mind, three participating teachers designed an activity around summarizing class readings they asked students to complete via Twitter. One participant claimed that when students have to fit their summary of reading within Twitter's 140-character limit, they learn to write succinctly.

This finding ties neatly with Jenna McWilliams, Daniel Hickey, Mary Beth Hines, Jennifer Conner, and Stephen C. Bishop's (2011) assertion that Twitter can be a viable platform for developing students' literacy skills beyond simple reading and writing. Alec R. Hosterman (2012) also advocated using the platform to enhance students' linguistic abilities due to the character restraint built into Twitter's design.

However, even among participants who used Twitter in their writing classes, privacy issues were cited as the biggest reservation. In order to overcome this concern, Meng-Fen Grace Lin, Ellen S. Hoffman, and Claire Borengasser (2013) suggested creating a class hashtag to filter course-related tweets without the need for professors or students to follow each other, which I believe could protect the privacy of both professors and students while using Twitter in class. This is why I created a unique course hashtag for my students to use in the activity described at the opening of this chapter. Even though only one participant referred to creating a class hashtag, I strongly recommend using hashtags to facilitate collecting students' tweets without any concerns about teacher or student privacy.

Combining traditional and non-traditional genres, some teachers described assignments that included multimodal texts, such as producing videos to be shared on YouTube. One teacher argued that students who work with images to create an assigned video "gain a better understanding of Creative Commons and copyright for the twenty-first century." This attention to using Creative Commons is likely to enhance students' ability to integrate sources fairly and effectively in their texts in both print and multimodal texts, a traditionally challenging task for many writing teachers.

In addition to using social media sites to develop the aforementioned skills, and similar to the Social Media 4880 Facebook page description cited earlier, participants seem to have leveraged the social nature of these sites to build communities of interaction and communication in the writing class.

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Building a community of teachers and students that extends beyond classroom walls was a common purpose of using social media sites among participants in this study. Student engagement was the ultimate goal of building a community of students who communicate and interact in and out of class through different social media platforms. Before explaining how social media promotes student engagement, it is important to establish a consensus on what I mean by engagement. I chose Ronald A. Yaros' (2012) definition of engagement as a "situational interest in a particular environment such as a social network" (p. 60). Yaros' definition matches the context of this study because he contended that students are actually engaged when they have sustained interest not only in the content being presented but also in the media used in presenting that content. As students demonstrate interest in social media sites, they become engaged in the content presented on these sites.

In this study, social media sites were perceived by participating teachers as platforms for potentially extending and sustaining class discussions. Facebook, for instance, was mostly used as a means of communication between teachers and students. A number of participants cited using Facebook groups as an alternative to email communication with students. Other participants reported using Facebook private groups for communication and out-of-class discussion. Having a course Facebook page for communication and interaction between the teacher and students was recommended by one student in Amicucci's (2014) study in which she explored students' non-academic practices on social media. As Facebook becomes more ubiquitous in students' lives (Elavsky, 2012), the walls of Facebook private groups may replace discussion boards very soon.

Moving to Twitter, teachers reported that Twitter was mainly used as an immediate and additional channel of communication among students (see also Faris' findings about Twitter for communication among students in his chapter in this volume). However, some teachers mentioned that they used Twitter to keep the conversation going between class sessions. One teacher elaborated, saying that they encouraged students "to tweet during class to our class hashtag and outside of class to engage with the material outside of our meeting session." Even though Twitter was used or suggested for similar purposes in other dis-

ciplines (Grosbeck & Holotescu, 2008; Hosterman, 2012; Lin, Hoffman, & Borengasser, 2013; Miners, 2010; Stevens, 2008), these participating teachers' self-reports about using Twitter for extending class discussions are the first data from writing teachers.

Student engagement can be seen in their participation in discussions as a form of communication requiring a great deal of interaction between teacher and students, enhancing meaning making, and developing a better command of writing concepts. This style of communication takes place on social media sites where much interaction and engagement occurs. Hence, Lily Zeng, Holly Hall, and Mary Jackson Pitts (2012) strongly recommended using social media for community building and sharing information. Yaros (2012) also emphasized that engagement facilitates knowledge and learning transfer, and thus he concluded that the appropriate use of social media in class can provide numerous opportunities for sharing beyond the brick and mortar of the classroom.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the integration of three social media platforms in teaching FYC in U.S. higher education institutions to understand the position of social media in teaching writing. Findings show that participants displayed a preference for alphabetic texts as compared to multimodal texts and for analytical activities as opposed to production-based ones.

ALPHABETIC VS. MULTIMODAL TEXTS

It is obvious that writing teachers who participated in this study wanted their FYC students to produce texts in a variety of forms and modalities. However, participants seemed to pay considerably more attention to the production of alphabetic texts than multimodal ones. This unbalanced attention to alphabetic over multimodal texts may be due to the traditional inclination toward verbal literacy and alphabetic texts at the expense of other modalities of text in writing studies (Selfe, 2009; Shipka, 2013). Writing teachers seem to have what Heather Urbanski (2010) described as persistent nostalgia for print texts. Most of the activities teachers designed for social media in this study focused primarily on alphabetic text, even on YouTube, a video-sharing platform, or Facebook, known as a platform for multimodal composing (Eisenlauer, 2014). People communicate on Facebook using various modes: They upload and share images and videos, share links to favorite articles and websites, and/or use virtual stickers and emotions to express their opinions and feelings about a given post. Briefly put, communication on Facebook is multimodal. Thus, the findings of the study

indicate that social media is being stripped of its non-alphabetic (multimodal and multimedia) meaning-making affordances.

Akiko Hemmi, Sian Bayne, and Ray Land (2009) provided a plausible interpretation of faculty's approach toward alphabetic versus multimodal texts; they argued that academia is characterized by slow adoption of new approaches while embracing an inherent preference for traditional models or the methodological status quo. This interpretation can be validated by reflecting on how participants in this study seemed to preserve the supremacy of alphabetic texts in almost all the activities they designed for social media platforms. Another possible interpretation of the use of social media for production of primarily alphabetic text could be the technical challenges faced by teachers and students in creating multimodal texts, or the fact that composing multimodal texts is time consuming (McNaught, Lam, Kwok, & Ho, 2011). This obstacle seems to have persisted since Vie's (2008) study. Many teachers in Vie's study claimed to have too little time to spend on learning or using technology and this made them reluctant to incorporate technology into their writing classes. Similarly, participants in this study may not be willing to invest more time or effort in learning and teaching students about creating multimodal content to be circulated through social media platforms. Urbanski (2010) offered some other reasons for writing teachers' avoidance of social media in their classes. Reasons included "the lack of guiding/orientation documents," the pressure that "we 'have' to use it," and fears of security and privacy breaches (p. 241). Availability and easy access to resources and technical support at institutions may facilitate more incorporation of multimodal composing by teachers who use social media platforms.

According to Yaros (2012), one reason behind the popularity of social media networks, particularly Facebook, is the ability to personalize content using multimodal and textual elements. When writing teachers restrict content development on social media to textual elements, they in fact deprive students from fully expressing themselves in a way that mimics their non-academic use of social media (see Anson's chapter in this volume). Writing studies scholars have argued similarly. Cynthia L. Selfe (2009) described composing as a "multimodal rhetorical activity" (p. 616) and she criticized the exclusion of multimodality in the writing class because she saw this as denying students "valuable" meaning-making methods. She patently opposed the supremacy of print text and the perception of the linguistic mode of communication as more elite than other modes. To Selfe, this dichotomy is unfair for students who need all modes to comprehend their multimodal lives and establish their identity in an increasingly multimodal world.

Frank Serafini (2014) also contended that the "exclusion" of multimodality from the writing classes is problematic because of "the multimodal nature of

modern communication” (p. 17). Serafini viewed multimodality as a means to enrich students’ literacies because it is what students consume and produce in their lives. He added that teachers should learn about the media students use in order to be able to engage them in class work.

Along the same lines of thought, Urbanski (2010) warned against alienation in the writing class that may occur when students believe a teacher does not appreciate their life experiences. This understanding may directly and indirectly reflect on students’ performance in the writing classes. When teachers insist on ignoring and degrading the texts students deal with outside the writing class, students may lose interest in the texts teachers insist on using and producing, no matter how important. As a result, students may experience a different form of digital divide pertaining to the discrepancy in uses of social media in and outside of the writing class. According to Urbanski, this new digital divide means that teachers “run the risk of alienating our students” (p. 248). Thus, the divide is not between students and their teachers’ perception of social media sites, as Vie (2008) concluded a few years ago; the divide is now between students’ everyday practices on social media and their academic practices.

Writing teachers should thus embrace Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s (2001) understanding of how multimodality has changed writing from being a “recording” of thoughts to “an originating medium” (p. 92) to be distributed, or shared using social media terms. This fundamental understanding resonates with Jason Ranker’s (2008) and Kress’ (1999) arguments that as students move between images, text, and sound, they transform and transfer their learning across modes. Furthermore, teachers should be more willing to acknowledge that using social media in the writing class embraces students’ craving for spaces where they can experience novel methods of doing academic work, spaces that resemble and build on the “digital media environments in which they work and play” (Andrews, 2010, p. 254).

ANALYSIS VS. PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES

The second conclusion to be garnered from this study is teachers’ preference for analysis over production activities. As discussed in the previous section, most participants reported asking students to analyze either the content of social media sites or their own behavior and writing on these sites. A feasible explanation of this phenomenon is the considerable ease of locating content and choosing existing behaviors to analyze versus the time-intensive process of designing and implementing production activities. Although analytical activities are crucial for developing students’ critical thinking skills, as I argued earlier, an important aspect of social media is the possibility of creating content easily (Rodriguez,

2011), which contradicts what most teachers reported in this study. Rodriguez cited Hoffman's conclusion from his case study research that using social media in teaching increases student engagement, collaborative learning, and sense of ownership. Engagement and the sense of ownership cannot be guaranteed without students becoming actively involved in creating their own content.

Describing her experience working with students to design and produce a multimodal website, Jennifer Sheppard (2009) related the production of multimodal texts to the "traditional print-based literacies and rhetorical practices" valued by most writing teachers (p. 122). She emphasized that producing multimodal texts has additional rhetorical and literacy value beyond that of traditional texts. She particularly discussed the value of students' attention to media choices and the affordances of different technologies students had to use to address the fundamental rhetorical concerns: audience, purpose, and context. Sheppard's conclusions about the complexity of skills students acquire through the production of multimodal text support Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) argument that multimodal texts incorporate different semiotics and therefore function as a replacement of verbal texts to represent and express oneself. The findings of this study confirm these arguments even though most participants did not incorporate many multimodal production activities in their writing classes.

Extending the conversation to students' future lives and careers, Matt Levinson (2010) strongly warned that lack of participation may become a new aspect of the digital divide. Levinson argued that unless teachers provide students with access to experiences and skills required in the increasingly participatory culture of work, students are not adequately prepared to play their "future roles as 21st-century citizens and workers" (p. ix). Moreover, Peter Duffy and Axel Bruns (2006) suggested that faculty should provide students with opportunities to experience the skills they will need outside the classroom and in their future careers in order to develop the competencies they will need after graduation. Students will most likely be required to produce text in different modalities in their workplaces, so overlooking production activities and multimodal composing in their writing class may negatively affect students' careers.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2013 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) annual report stated that "technology has become interwoven into the college experience" (p. 23), including social networking sites. The report concluded that student use of technology "was positively related to student engagement" (p. 23). Although the NSSE report is not limited to writing classes, it gives college educators and ad-

ministrators an insight into the direction of trends in higher education institutions. Students are increasingly engaging with their course work through the use of social media sites. This significant finding from the NSSE report supports the findings of this study relating to student engagement in and out of class when required to use different forms of new media technologies, specifically social media platforms. Apparently, the use of social media is proliferating across disciplines in higher education, a situation that should alert teachers of FYC classes to the paradigm shift that higher education is experiencing.

Amicucci (2014) recommended that teachers should build on the skills and expertise that students have developed over years of using social media in non-academic contexts. Writing teachers need to acknowledge and offer varied means of expression, particularly when integrating social media platforms in their classes. Based on students' suggestions in Amicucci's study, she recommended creating activities and assignments that merge writing practices from both academic and non-academic contexts. Amicucci's recommendations respond to Urbanski's (2010) fear that "we betray our students when we expect them to think like us, to value what we value, and to devalue what we reject or degrade simply because we tell them to do so" (p. 247).

Applying the results of the NSSE report to composition classes implies more than just acknowledging the changes sweeping higher education classes. It means promoting the informed and critical use of social media in writing classes so that students do not experience a digital divide between these classes and classes in their respective disciplines on one hand, and between the supremacy of print literacy in writing classes and the set of varied literacies they develop outside these classes.

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