

Chapter 8: Cultivating Signal, Noise, and Feeling: Songwriting Practices in Digital Rhetoric Courses

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1. “Untitled” by Martha Reifenberg

In this example, Martha Reifenberg discusses the impact of social media on literature. Her rationale includes a discussion of her musical choice that runs counter to the revolutionary nature of social media.

Transcript

[Dramatic, slow, hip-hop music fades in.]

Martha Reifenberg: It is obvious that technology has revolutionized the modern world, offering efficiency, innovation, and a platform for all people to express themselves as writers, artists, and politicians. One would think the combination of literature and technology in the classroom would also be efficient, innovative, and a platform for students to express themselves.

And it is.

However, the educational system is not in step with this technological revolution. It has failed to successfully integrate technology and social networking sites, which is, in fact, stealing opportunities from students.

It is nearly criminal.

[Music fades up for a moment before fading down to let us hear the narration again.]

Because these familiar apps, like Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter, are the perfect scholastic tool. By using modern apps, teachers are able to better engage their students, create more globalized citizens and promote efficiency within the classroom.

Highly regarded academic Peter Kunze celebrates social media in the classroom in the article “To Tweet or Not to Tweet: Using Twitter in the Literature Classroom.” He offers five strategies for incorporating Twitter into the classroom that offer opportunities for large-scale growth. The strategies are adaptation, roleplaying, prequels and sequels, reader response blogging, and Twitter stream co-lecture. For example, roleplaying is a recommended strategy that allows students to foster necessary empathy to connect with literary characters and reject David Elkind’s theory of “adolescent egocentrism.” Adolescent egocentrism is adolescents’ inability to distinguish between their perception of what others think about them and what people actually think in reality. Through roleplaying, students can create a Twitter handle, a mini-biography and tweets from literary characters—

[music cuts out]

Male British actor *[reading from Henry V, Act 4, Scene 3]:* Henry the fifth, act four, scene three. What’s he that wishes so?

Martha Reifenberg: —which allows for humor *[a laugh track plays]* but also deeper understanding of the character. *[music returns]* In the end, Kunze concludes social media as an educational tool that empowers students as readers, writers and thinkers.

The second source, “Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee in 140 Characters or Less: Using Twitter as a Creative Approach to Literature in the Intermediate German Classroom”—

[music cuts out]

Man: [Two or three sentences in German, before it fades out. The online description of the audio at *Freesound.org* (s9ames, 2013) describes it as “German translation of an Italian speech before a concert in Bologna Italy.”]

[music returns]

Martha Reifenberg: —“Using Twitter as a Creative Approach to Literature in the Intermediate German Classroom” is written by Christiane Steckenbiller. Christiane Steckenbiller, who has a PhD in comparative literature, discusses the global opportunities, educational or not, associated with combining literature and social media. First, Steckenbiller addresses the obvious: Technology has permanently altered the way the world is and will be perceived. She, similar to Kunze and his “To Tweet or not to Tweet,” [applause sound layered in] applauds media outlets like Twitter for constantly facilitating language. Social networking systems provide actual, authentic experiences for the intermediate foreign-language classroom. With the most importance, I believe that globalizing individual classrooms with social networking systems will not only inspire students to learn, but also inspire them to become more active and global citizens.

[Music fades out.]

Furthermore, I see a future in combining social networking sites and literature—a category assumed to be old and fading in modern American culture. Social network systems today are alike to the paper and pen Henry David Thoreau used to write *Walden*. They are the same as the keyboard Toni Morrison writes drafts on. Twitter, Instagram, etc. are platforms where artists can express their thoughts about politics, spirituality, love, and other timeless themes, driven by contemporary disputes of immigration, gay marriage, transgender rights, women rights and earth sustainability.

[Music fades back in.]

Some people fear technology’s rapid growth, but other human history is not disappearing. It still exists. It will always exist. Combining literature and social media is simply the process of expanding and growing and innovating one’s potential.

References

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Written Rationale: Audio Essay Recast

Combining social media and literature in the classroom is necessary. Social media is an underutilized tool that is reflected of youth culture. To further sway my audiences, I created a podcast, with the assistance of modern technology. In this remodel or reconstruction, I will insist on social media’s use and benefits of technological change.

Podcasts are becoming increasingly popular in American culture. They teach, entertain, humor and or empower listeners, encouraging audiences to experience a larger wealth of knowledge. Podcasts and their dominance are extremely relevant to controversy of combining literature and social media in the classroom, making it the best approach to present my opinion. Podcasts, similar to social networking sites, are a result of technological advancement. As technology becomes more and more available to the public, individuals are more and more enabled to fit the devices to their own needs and interests. Podcasts and social media have transformed into outlets where users can express their thoughts, attitudes, ideas, etc. Both create a global platform and can be adapted in multiple ways, especially in a classroom. Yet, the educational system is not taking advantage of the opportunity. Teachers should be teaching students about the value and responsibility of speaking on this platform. Teachers should celebrate how often podcasts and social media facilitates language. Teachers should empower their students to voice their thoughts on the global platform. But not all teachers acknowledge technology's encompassing role in the modern world, which is limiting student's potential.

The intended audience is those within the educational system: teachers, students, administrators, etc. The purpose of my podcast is to convince of the necessity of technology and how it should be integrated into classrooms. Social media is reflective of youth culture, meaning students relate and understand it. Therefore, it should be used a tool to reach students, separating the gap between them and their teacher. On social networking sites like Twitter, the writing is concise, clear and creative, encouraging the development of dynamic language skills. Also, it is relevant to mention that social media would not be a teaching substitute, but rather an addition. Older generations fear the disappearance of sophisticated writing, but the integration of social media into the classroom would merely add a new dynamic and perspective to writers. After hearing my podcast, I would want my audience to be more aware and open to the possibility of social media as a teaching tool.

I choose a low, atmospheric music in hopes to create a mellow, slightly upbeat ambiance. Social media is sometimes controversial or, deemed by certain individuals of older generations, the destroyer of sophisticated language. Despite the harsh view, I did not want revolutionary music. Instead, I aimed to present myself logically, but still resolutely, in a relaxed atmosphere. My music stayed constant, with random pieces that mirror direct phrases (e.g., Henry David Thoreau pen scratching sound). I hope that the music set a tone, yet it was my words and content that I hoped would sway audiences. As a result, I was deliberate with my rhetoric. I formulated eloquent sentences to best defend social media's place in the classroom. It was interesting to be so involved with rhetoric, especially when writing a paper that dissects the many layers of language. My choices concerning my podcast all had purpose in an effort to create the most influential argument.

All in all, social media is important, modern and another layer of language. While it is not the foundation or hearth or bedrock of language, social media is reflective of humanity's ability to grow and change – it is a platform where a person can grow and change. It is opportunity and self-expression. It is limitless and should be accessible to students as a learning tool.