<u>**Teaching & Technology in Media Studies**</u>

Jacqueline Ryan Vickery, *University of North Texas*

As a digital media scholar, I frequently experiment with different apps and platforms in the classroom and as part of student assignments. Some of these have been successful in some contexts, such as Twitter and blogs, while others have been more work than they are worth, also such as Twitter and blogs. Live polling sites such as PollEverywhere and interactive gaming sites such as Kahoot garner some novelty points, but the pedagogical aspects are often just as easily – or more easily – accomplished with pen and paper or whiteboard and marker. Certainly these are all merely tools and like all tools, their effectiveness is contingent on both the user (or in this case the professor) as well as the project itself. I'm more than willing to discuss my experiences with any of these tools, but I'd also like to expand the conversation to not only thinking about technology *in* the classroom, but to also consider digital literacy as a component of students' lives more holistically – particularly as citizens participating in the public sphere *beyond* the classroom.

In this discussion, I want to focus on the ways educators can use technology to help students develop a public voice via participation in networked publics. Some students have developed the necessary literacies that allow them to navigate social network sites in beneficial, public, and/or professional ways. However, I have found that too often the fear-mongering rhetoric of "don't say anything that will get you in trouble" has led some students to disengage from social media or to silo off their participation in increasingly private ways. These silencing and siloing practices are arguably effective privacy strategies, but they also lead to missed opportunities for acquiring social capital, finding a public voice, networking with professionals in their industry, and participating in online intellectual debates.

Given that the majority of my students have aspirations to work in Hollywood, or NYC, or to enter the professional creative arts industry, it is vital they learn to network with those in their industry. They need to be "searchable" and "findable" within a professional context. Yet, having come-of-age at the height of media panics about online stranger danger, many are reluctant to create a public profile or participate on social media for purposes other than interpersonal communication with their peers. As young people continue to hear horror stories of someone losing their job as a result of a social media post, it is no wonder they flock to more personal, private, and ephemeral platforms such as Snapchat. And that is all well and good, but as an educator I want to help my students think about technology as a tool for public participation as well.

In my courses – particularly Social Media Strategies and Digital Activism – I create assignments that require students to create a public and professional online persona, either as an individual or as part of an organizational group campaign. If anyone wants to chat about the ethical challenges and consideration of this, I think that's an important conversation to constantly revisit. I would also like to talk about the benefits of creating opportunities for students to connect their classroom assignments with a larger purpose, be it professional or civic. Blogging, while not a new and sexy platform, teaches students to write for a public audience, to communicate messages outside of the classroom, and for an audience other than their teacher. Finding an appropriate and confident public voice can be a challenge for a lot of students. I have found that group blogs work best as it requires collaboration, scheduling and time management, and a commitment to a theme, while dividing the labor necessary for maintaining an active blog. Likewise, although many of my students consider themselves to be digitally savvy, few have built websites or learned basic website literacy. So I also have students design and maintain group

websites that allow them opportunities to develop basic editing skills, but these sites also serve as hubs for their messages, creative work (e.g. films), and as an interface for public dialog.

Ultimately, one of my primary pedagogical goals is to help my students learn how to network, how to construct personal learning networks, and how to utilize digital media for social good. I have several digital activism campaigns that have come out of my courses that serve as positive examples of connecting digital literacy to spheres and networks that transcend the boundaries of the classroom, some of which have led to real changes at my university. AS such, my use of technology in the classroom is actually much more focused on students' use of technology beyond the classroom so that they can learn how to participate in networked publics in socially, professionally, and personally beneficial ways.