



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



3 Possibilities of Teaching with Twitter

Robert Williamson Jr, *Hendrix College*

Blog Series: 12 Surprises When Lecturing Less

November 05, 2013

Tags: teaching with media | engaged learning | discussions

For several years now, I have experimented with using social media to improve student learning. I began with an exercise using Twitter to teach reader-oriented biblical interpretation (see my recent article in *Teaching Theology & Religion*). As the Gospel of Mark was read aloud in class, I asked students to tweet their reactions and responses to the text. I displayed the Twitter stream to the class, so that students could see and interact with the responses of their classmates. For a follow-up assignment, I asked students to analyze their own tweets and those of one other student, reflecting on how a reader's social location and life experience can affect the way that reader encounters the text. The exercise helped them understand themselves as positioned readers and provided a useful entrée into more theoretical discussions of various forms of reader-oriented interpretation.

Since writing that article, I've continued to develop my own use of Twitter in the classroom and have learned a great deal from others doing similar work. I've also encountered some very good teachers who express reasonable doubts about the use of Twitter as a pedagogical tool.



Here then, in the spirit of our ongoing collaboration about pedagogy, are what I take to be three possibilities and three pitfalls of teaching with Twitter (this will be part 1 and part 2 will be posted tomorrow). I hope you'll continue the conversation in the comments!

1. Twitter can extend class discussions beyond the classroom. I give my students daily assignments that ask them to tweet about their own interpretive work or to comment on class readings via Twitter. Other students respond with their own insights, generating a class discussion before we ever get to class. This process increases student contact time with the course material, with me, and with other students, and it allows our in-class discussions to begin at a deeper level than if we were starting from scratch. To see how I structure these



assignments, see this recent post.

2. Twitter can encourage students to read more closely. It seems my students' reading comprehension has improved—as indicated both by the quality of class discussions and student self-evaluations—since I started asking them to tweet responses to class readings. Having to make claims about a text in a public way, knowing that other students may respond or that they may be called on in class to expand or support their ideas, encourages closer and more thoughtful engagement with the readings.

3. Twitter can provide an opening for quieter students to participate in class discussions. I often create a Storify of student tweets from the homework assignment to use as the basis for starting class discussions. This allows student ideas and interests to shape our classroom discussions, and it allows me to draw on the ideas of quieter or more reticent

students. Several of my shy students have commented on evaluations that they feel more confident speaking to a point they have already made via Twitter than simply being called on in class.

Of course, Twitter isn't the panacea for creating critically engaged learning. Tomorrow's post will discuss three pitfalls on using twitter for theological education.

Find Robert at hendrix.academia.edu/robertwilliamson or on Twitter at [@rwilliamsonjr](https://twitter.com/rwilliamsonjr).

<https://wabash.center/2013/11/3-possibilities-of-teaching-with-twitter/>