



“I Totally Missed That!”: Using Twitter to Teach Critical Listening

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Description:

Being an active, engaged, critical “public listener” is as important as learning the skills of “public speaking.” Most public speaking instructors conceptually differentiate between hearing, passive and active listening, and critical listening for their students, but to what extent do we guide the actual practice and self-assessment of these skills outside of the public speaking classroom? This activity uses Twitter to teach students about (critical) listening through experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), which involves an independent experience had by the student, followed by in-class reflection, analysis, and application. Social media sites like Twitter increasingly prove to be successful tools for accomplishing experiential learning objectives (Rinaldo, Tapp, & Laverie, 2011; Shilpa, 2014). Following a “live-tweeting” experiment at a speech event (or events) in the community, students share, compare, and contrast their own tweets with those of their classmates and discuss observations that can be made about their listening behaviors during public speaking events.

Materials Needed

- Each student will need to create a Twitter account if they do not already have one (students can create an anonymous/“fake” account if necessary and delete it afterwards).
- Students should have access to Microsoft Excel for the download of their Twitter archive, or Microsoft Word if they choose to collect and table their tweets manually.
- The instructor will need to have a computer that is Internet accessible and linked to a projector in the classroom.

Course Requirements

This activity is ideal for students in any level of a public speaking or speech-related course.

Objectives

After this activity, students should be able to:

- Define and articulate the concepts of hearing, passive and active listening, and critical listening.
- Demonstrate the ability to see how tweets/collections of tweets demonstrate various listening behaviors.
- Assess their own listening behaviors through reflection on their experience in comparison with others.
- Devise strategies to be better critical listeners
- Feel more connected to fellow classmates through shared experiential learning.

Instructions

1. You can present a lesson on hearing/listening either before OR after the activity, depending on how you would like to facilitate the discussion part of the activity.
2. Provide the students with 2-3 options to attend public speaking events on campus or in a nearby community venue. Have the students commit to these in writing so you know which students are attending which events.
3. Have the students sign up for a Twitter account on their phones or tablet devices. (These are available for borrow in most university libraries if the students do not have a smartphone or tablet).
4. Have the students “live tweet” the public speaking event. NOTE: Do not provide further instructions on what to tweet, since the goal will be to assess what they choose to tweet as indicative of their personal listening behaviors (Some might only tweet the main points of the speech, others will

- comment on delivery, others will talk about the setting or audience, others will tweet their opinions and thoughts). You may choose to provide a connecting class hashtag so the students can see what others are tweeting in real time, or you may choose to forgo this option in lieu of the students having a more solo listening experience to be compared with others in class discussion afterwards.
5. After the event, have the students go to Settings in Twitter and download their tweet archive, which will be emailed to them as an Excel file. They will have to clean up the columns a bit.
 6. Have all students bring a paper copy of their tweets to class and email you a copy so you can pull them up on the screen.
 7. Choose two “different” accounts of the event to pull up on the screen to kick off discussion, and ask the class to compare and contrast the content of the tweet collections.
 - a. Though the collections feature the same speech, demonstrate how the focus on different pieces of information illustrate how we listen subjectively. Point out how comments about the speaker, setting, and audience add to or detract from critical listening. Find tweets that exemplify passive listening, active listening, and critical listening.
 8. Have the students break into groups to repeat the exercise within their groups.
 9. Have the groups share some of their observations with the class, synthesize what the class learned about listening, and devise strategies for better critical listening as a group.

The Perks

- First and foremost, this activity is relevant to students. According to Twitter’s financial report in December 2014, 284 million people actively use Twitter and 46% of US college student social media users tweet on a daily basis (Smith, 2014). Therefore, most students are at least familiar with how Twitter works and many of them will already have “live-tweeting” experience. The opportunity for students to incorporate a popular tool they use on a daily basis for entertainment into a learning experience is appealing. The relevancy embedded in this activity is a key pedagogical tool; as Frymier (2002) explains, the more relevant the content, the more motivated students are to learn.
- This activity provides a lot of flexibility in discussion. How the discussion about listening goes will depend upon the observations the students make about the tweet collections. This means that the lesson will feel “new” every time it is taught by the instructor, and will feel personalized and novel for the students.
- The students have some autonomy and get to take ownership over the learning process in this activity in selecting the event to attend, deciding what to tweet, deciding how to analyze it, and having the opportunity to self-assess. Through this experiential learning activity, students will feel like they have more to contribute to discussion, will take responsibility for the subject-matter, and will feel more connected to the class (Boud, 2012).

References

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