

On the Use of Social Media in the Classroom

By Meredith White, Gwinnett County Public Schools

I use social media every day in my public, high school classroom, and hey, I haven't been on the news yet. It's a statement I make jokingly but in which there's an element of truth: we live in a litigious society where the polemics against educators are many and often. So how, then, do we use certain technologies that 2019 can offer in safe, effective, transparent ways for added input, repetition, and language use? Behold, the class [Snapchat](#) account. [Read: "Ta-daaa!", jazz hands.]

For a long time, Snapchat lived in a compartment in my brain with other things I no longer need (high school boyfriends, size two pants, The Backstreet Boys, etc.). However, in the fall of 2015, knowing we already had a class Instagram page and that I was open to trying new things, my students begged, "PLEASE start a class Snapchat! PLEASE!" I was hesitant, of course, but they were **very** convincing, and, as a bonus, my desired username was available. "OK, let's do it, *but no funny business*," I said with a furrowed brow, and we embarked.

Three and a half years later, and wow, they were right. It has been *such* a fun journey to experiment posts, use different functions, and overall interact with them via Snapchat in ways that may not be possible otherwise. I now use [Snapchat](#) in our in-class warm-up (anticipatory set) activities each day, as well as to post notifications (in addition to remind.com), go on [scavenger hunts](#), and [more](#). Let's jump right in, shall we?

When Laura Sexton [blew my mind](#) with performance-based, anticipatory set options last fall, I immediately thought of Snapchat. I started giving warm-up options, and told students to choose X amount of the options given. One option every day became, "Check and respond to anything on Snapchat," and that means that I needed to have posted something onto our class Snapchat "story" that is high frequency and/or applies to our current unit in context. [Snapchat](#) comes with built-in (different every day) videos via the back camera (open a picture; hold your finger anywhere; outward camera video filters will appear; choose one) – these are really neat for you to create quick, improvised input videos with high-frequency vocabulary for your students. These videos are made with

your custom [Bitmoji](#) and are *really* fun to use, especially if your Bitmoji looks a lot like you. Suddenly, you have an animated video of yourself doing something out of the ordinary, humorous, or both. They're engaging, and then you can pose a question or story as the caption — in the example screencast [here](#), I ask, “Does Mrs. White have allergies?” and students can respond, “Yes, she has allergies.” Sometimes, especially early in the semester, when I pose a third-person question, I have students respond in the first-person form, “Yes, I have allergies,” which shows me they need more input in the third-person forms, i.e., more opportunities to dialogue *about* other people as well as about themselves. My students respond directly in Snapchat, and it affords me a quick, easy formative assessment opportunity. I love it!

There are limitless opportunities for using Snapchat as described above: pictures in class with captions (love [capturing](#) moments!), scavenger hunts where they Snap back once they find ____, QR codes to authentic resource videos and more. Another great way to use the story/feed function is to post authentic resources that students probably wouldn't have seen otherwise. I know that I very intentionally have my phone in Spanish and follow certain pages/people for input opportunities — now, we can share them with students without having to print an article, create an activity, or suggest they follow X and Y but never know if they actually did. We can offer up more opportunities to expose students to language and encourage choice. Perhaps for the aforementioned Option Six in my warm-up activities, in addition to or instead of just one or two options that they have to comment back on, I say, “Pick one and _____,” and I've posted multiple. A screenshot from a news source or celebrity feed works for the picture, and then a link to the article can be [posted](#) using the attachment feature. In front of your very eyes, you have data on what students are viewing, if they've taken screenshots of favorites, and students can respond directly.

So, we know authentic resources are awesome, but what about the resources we curate ourselves for our students and our own language classrooms? An example: my Spanish II students are always beginning a travel unit right at the beginning of spring teacher conference season in March. That means we're talking travel preferences, packing habits, adventures, transportation and more when I'm headed to SCOLT, CSCTFL, NECTFL, and FLAG. Bam! With the class Snapchat I can then post instant pictures and videos from my trips in real time (and then [save the stories](#) by

the way, for a video [montage](#) to be posted on a class YouTube, EdPuzzle, etc.). I can also customize the input for my specific students and unit objectives, which is *super cool*. If I have specific pictures that I think are particularly eye-catching, artistic, or special, I will also use our [class Instagram](#). From Instagram, I can screenshot that picture and then put it into Snapchat and double-dip on the likelihood that students will see and read it. To take it a step further, I have downloaded and synced up the [Chatbooks](#) app on my phone with said class Instagram. I am a little bit obsessed with Chatbooks because for every 60 pictures I post to our class Instagram, they create a tangible photo book that then mails to me for \$8, auto-shipped and auto-billed. My classroom now has over a dozen volumes that span the five years I've had the account open for classroom use. The Chatbooks can be used for displays, extension activities, extra credit, [FVR](#), picture of the day (via document camera), free response, and the list goes on!

But, what's the catch? There isn't one, really, but I make sure to have parameters:

1) 7am-7pm is when I respond to student snaps. Before or after that period of time looks weird on 'paper', so I don't do it. (Again, think headline: "Female teacher messages male student at 9pm via Snapchat," shudder.)

2) If a student sends an innocuous but irrelevant message for "[streaks](#)," I block them (until they notice, ask, and promise to not clog up my phone again).

3) Having said that about blocking, I only add students one way; they add me. I don't add them back. This part is tricky because it functions more like Instagram and not Facebook. We want the students to add one way, to follow us, and not the other way around, too, like a mutual following. The students following us allows them to see the class Snapchat story and communicate, but I don't add them and therefore I can't see their story or anything personal. We are mandated reporters after all, and that's just creepy. (Again, we shudder.)

What have I missed? Find me at @PRHSspanish on Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, as well as tinyurl.com/senorablancoteaches, tinyurl.com/senorablancoshares, and tinyurl.com/senorablancogoesdeskfree!

Meredith White is a Georgia transplant and earned her B.A., B.S., and M.Ed. all from the University of Georgia. Currently, she is working toward her Ph.D. (Foreign Language Education) from, you guessed it, the University of Georgia.

Since 2007-08, she has taught in private, public, and charter, urban, suburban, and/or rural settings. Her focus on novice learners works to ingrain proficiency, authentic resources, genuine tasks, student-centered thematic units, student-guided lessons, and making language learning enjoyable. When she isn't at PRHS teaching Spanish, she's at Georgia State University teaching educational methods classes in the evenings.



Addicted to collaboration and professional development, you can typically find her at state, regional, and national workshops, both attending and presenting. Furthermore, she blogs, moderates the weekly PLNs #langchat (@PRHSspanish), and serves as a SCOLT Executive Board Member and a SEALLT Executive Board Member.