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Teacher education protocol : how social media improves connections between teachers and students

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Teacher education protocol : how social media improves connections between teachers and students

Abstract

This review examines the importance of incorporating social media into teacher education programs to strengthen the partnership between teachers and their students in the classroom. Social media plays a big part in individuals' everyday lives. The purpose of this review is to display the benefits of social media tools in education. Peer reviewed journals were used for research. The studies examined found that social media tools can have a benefit in the classroom and strengthen the learning partnership between teachers, students, and parents. The sources reviewed also found that proper incorporation of these tools aids in a better learning partnership between teachers and their students.

TEACHER EDUCATION PROTOCOL: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IMPROVES
CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

A Graduate Review

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Division of Instructional Technology

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ABSTRACT

This review examines the importance of incorporating social media into teacher education programs to strengthen the partnership between teachers and their students in the classroom. Social media plays a big part in individuals' everyday lives. The purpose of this review is to display the benefits of social media tools in education. Peer reviewed journals were used for research. The studies examined found that social media tools can have a benefit in the classroom and strengthen the learning partnership between teachers, students, and parents. The sources reviewed also found that proper incorporation of these tools aids in a better learning partnership between teachers and their students.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media is defined as, “Forms of electronic communication (such as web sites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content” (Merriam Webster, 2004). Through the development and use of these web-based tools, students have been able to communicate more effectively in regard to their personal and academic lives. This creation has re-designed the learning process and how education is being perceived by students. With this shift towards embracing new technologies, it is important for teachers to fully understand how to accommodate this new medium for learning into their instruction.

This review will examine how social media is benefitting education and how higher education institutions are using social media in their teacher preparation programs. This is important because technology has become a primary tool in the lives of students. Being able to connect with students in a manner that is relevant to their everyday lives provides an extra benefit and motivation to the learning process.

This review will focus on the benefits of incorporating social media into education. It will also examine what teacher preparation programs are doing to ensure that future educators are prepared to use social media as a learning enhancement. Christopher Lehman, principal of the Science Leadership Academy, states, “Social media is part of kids’ lives, either we acknowledge it exists and allow ourselves to be part of the conversation, or it’s one more way school becomes irrelevant to kids. Any tool is a weapon if you hold it right” (cited in Jackson, 2011, p. 40). The ultimate solution to help teachers understand how to use social media is having teacher preparation programs incorporate a learning component to help pre-service teachers be prepared to utilize and incorporate such technologies.

“Some 93% of teens use the internet, and more of them than ever are treating it as a venue for social interaction – a place where they can share creations, tell stories, and interact with others” (Pew Internet, 2007). Davis (2010) discusses that blogging and social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, are important for educators to keep up with the pace of technology to make learning as effective as possible for their students.

“Current social software applications on the World Wide Web not only support social interaction feedback, conversation, and networking, but also allow individuals and groups to engage in activities that expand knowledge by allowing them to build connections with others” (Lee & McLoughlin, 2010). The reality is that social media has created a new medium to help improve overall learning and communication. The more information teachers have about social media, the better they can formulate their instruction to keep students engaged in the learning process. This review will explore the following questions:

1. How is social media being used in teacher education?
2. What effects do social media have on teacher education?
3. How does using social media affect the learning partnership between both the teachers and students in education?

METHODOLOGY

Information presented in this paper is provided from articles and books that relate to social media and its role in education. The information was provided from online searches via Google, Google Scholar and library database searches from the University of Northern Iowa Rod Library. The databases used to search for references included using ERIC, Academic Search Elite, and UNISTAR. Resources were also obtained from individuals' personal blogging sites found through Google searches. Online searches were executed using the following terms: *social media in education, teacher preparation programs and social media, pre-service teachers and social media, studies on technology in education programs, technology in education, social media in higher education, web technologies in teacher education, and education majors and social media.*

The primary focus when gathering information was finding sources with both quantitative and qualitative research. The research studies obtained relate to various teacher education programs and current practices being implemented in such programs throughout the U.S. The use of social media is new and still evolving, so sources that had some sort of specific data and numbers were top priority. Resources were sought that were related to technology and teaching on all levels. The researcher wanted to find sources with research closely related to higher education, but did look at K-12 education as well. While searching for valid information a preference was given to articles that directly related to how social media benefits education and ways it is currently being used in the classroom. The validity of the sources obtained was evaluated based on whether they actually measured the results of the topic being researched. Studies that showed clear results and data related to social media in teacher education were given preference. The research analysis also

considered the publication date and its relevance to the subject matter. Articles published less than 8 years ago were given the most consideration. Preference was given to information obtained from the Rod Library databases due to past experience with using these databases in other courses. The researcher also looked at how many other times the source was cited in other work and looked at the content and accuracy of the information. What audience to which the material was directed also played an important role and each source needed to have statistics to back up the data found.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Social media has opened many doors to aid in communication and collaboration. With this trend continuing to grow, it is necessary to see just how beneficial these technologies can be if incorporated into the classroom. Many schools are requiring that teachers start incorporating more technology components into their instruction. It is being discovered that many current teachers need additional development and training in order to meet these demands. In this section this review will look at the questions surrounding social media and its place in education.

With the advancement of technology over the years, social media has been a driving force of how society communicates. It has had a strong impact on how the younger generation views and carries about everyday activities. This new way of thinking is a reason why educators need to be able to use social media as a connector to classroom goals. This review will examine current studies and research that supports social media in education and answer the questions initially.

This review will discuss how social media is being used in teacher education. The reviewer will also identify what effects social media has on teacher education and how social media affects the learning partnership between teachers and students in education. Some of the main types of social media being used in education will be discussed along with their advantages to re-defining instruction. How social media plays a role in higher educational programs will be outlined. The reviewer has also included a break down on how certain social media tools work better at connecting with students and parents over others. As technology continues to evolve its important for educators to be able to connect with the tools as best they can to ensure the highest quality of learning is achieved.

Social Media in Teacher Education

There has been a movement to integrate technology into the classroom for the past few decades. With the way social media has impacted the daily lives of individuals; many educators seek professional development opportunities or outside workshops to brush up on the latest technology to use in the classroom. Some of the dominant social media tools being used in the classrooms are Twitter, Blogs, VoiceThread, YouTube, and Second Life, just to name a few. Knowing what tools are available and their benefit to different learning objectives in the classroom is beneficial for future educators. The many types of social tools available provide an opening for learning to take multiple paths, to shape learning in various ways that may be more motivating to learners.

Types of Social Media

There are many types of social media available for educators to use. Hutton and Fosdick (2011) describe the many general purposes for using social media. They describe how social media can have a benefit that can be incorporated into education. This study discusses how these tools allow individuals to connect on many levels. They state, "The dominant force in social media increasingly appears to be social networks" (Hutton & Fosdick, p. 567). Social networks that are primarily used by society are those such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace; they allow people to share any and all new aspects that may be going on with their personal lives. This article points out that, aside from the social networking, there are other tools available that can allow students to still share their opinions and be motivated to contribute to their learning community. Hutton and Fosdick (2011) further discuss how social media can be used in many forms. Those forms include: micro-

blogging, building communities, collaboration, social networking, virtual worlds and gaming (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011).

Micro-blogging

There are many advantages to using social media in the classroom. Depending on the grade level, certain social media tools have a greater impact over others. For example, the use of Twitter has been used as a tool to bring students of all ages together via micro-blogging. Billiot (2011) says, “Twitter creates a community. It enabled my students to communicate with one another during the semester as they shared their successes and struggles” (p. 3). In a high school and college setting, Twitter helps bridge the gap between on-campus and off-campus students. One advantage that Twitter has over other sites, such as Facebook is that, “Twitter is more about creating connections with others who may not be your real friends” (Miners, 2009). When using Twitter, one has a freedom to weigh in one’s opinion on any topic without personally knowing everyone in the conversation. Users may also find that they end up having followers that they do not know, but share the same beliefs based on how they interact on Twitter.

Although Twitter can be used for all grade levels, it is best when used in situations where learners can provide meaningful feedback based on their opinions, thoughts, and personal experience with a particular topic. This may not be something younger children can engage in and benefit from, but there are other tools that can be beneficial in the classroom.

Building Learning Communities

Many tools aid in community building via sharing media. Rivero (2011) discusses multiple social media tools that are good to use in a classroom and that help build the community among students, teachers, and even parents. He points out that Edmodo is

considered the “Facebook of education” (p. 13). Edmodo is a site for teachers, students, parents, and school districts where they can post classroom material, videos, share links, grades, homework, and all sorts of other information that is related to school only. There is also SchoolTube that allows access to all sorts of video that can be topic starters for classroom team building. Some other social media that aid in building communities as Rivero (2011) describes in detail are: Glogster EDU, Collaborize Classroom, EDU 2.0, Kidblog.org, Edublogs (p. 14-16).

Blogging is one way to introduce students to exploring more social media tools. With blogging, students can identify how to present their thoughts and opinions publicly to their peers and educators. Davis and McGrail (2009) state, “Blogging builds a community that fosters respect and inspires students to want to continue to learn and blog about it” (p. 75). Once students become comfortable using social media tools to network with their own classroom, it opens the door for educators to expand social networking to students outside of the same school, district, city, state, and even country.

Ramig (2009) discusses how social tools can be used as discussion extenders at a younger age. Once a topic has been identified in the classroom, students can use social tools to further expand their thoughts on that subject to be able to share the next day with classmates. Having a variety of learning tools in the classroom and allowing students to have exposure to these tools helps further the learning process. Jackson (2011) states, “it is important for educators to understand our students and try to meet them halfway. To ignore how our students learn and operate would only push them away from enjoying the process of learning” (p. 39). Jackson (2011) sheds light on the importance of syncing education with the way students are currently learning. Using a style of teaching that connects most with

students not only increases their motivation, but also provides more opportunities to make sure all students feel comfortable contributing in class.

Collaboration

One big advantage of using social media in the classroom is the ability to facilitate collaboration. With younger students, just getting them exposed to social media is a way to make them aware of technology and how it can be used to foster learning. VoiceThread is a tool that can be adapted to many classrooms to help foster collaboration. The Teaching and Learning with Technology unit at Penn State (2010) describes VoiceThread as a totally web-based application that allows you to place collections of media, like images, videos, documents, and presentations at the center of an asynchronous conversation. Brunvand and Byrd (2011) state that the benefit of VoiceThread is that it is “easily accessible, cost-effective, applicable across most subject matter and grade levels, and adaptable to many learning settings (p. 28)”.

VoiceThread allows students to interact using recorded messages to respond and provide feedback. Students can work together on one topic or individually. There is an option where students can type their thoughts, but this tool sets the foundation of how students can collaborate with each other. Students using this tool can learn how to listen and be open to the opinion of others even though the opinions may be different from their own.

“VoiceThread enables teachers to capitalize on student learning strengths and preferred learning modalities by encouraging active participation in the learning process” (Brunvand & Byrd, 2011, p. 28). They go on to discuss that this tool helps passive learners become more involved in the classroom and aids in building relationships with their peers.

Blogging also fosters collaboration as it allows others to read and post comments relating to the original blog posted. Davis and McGrail (2009) state that, "Writing and replying to comments was a favorite part of the process and was usually the first thing students did when they came to blogging class" (p. 75). They mention how blogging allowed the readers to contribute more ideas and suggestions and produced more student directed learning. One thing this study found was that blogging helped students with "learning to express their own points of view, dealing with confusion, uncertainty, and not always having an immediate answer" (p. 76). Not only did the students find that their contributions helped make information clear for others, but also they were able to understand that it is acceptable to not always have the correct response. It opened the doors for students to feel more comfort in working with their classmates and providing their opinions.

A tool that educators may overlook as being a collaborative driver for students is Survey Monkey. Rivero (2011) discusses how Survey Monkey plays a big part in helping online conversations develop. Many may see this tool as something educators use to have students rate a particular project or give feedback on classroom related things. However, this tool does even more as far as creating conversation. He states how the use of Survey Monkey helps with "creating fun questions that provide real time results with ease. Quizzes, online tests, and student feedback [sic] (p. 15)". He makes it a point that educators should look into all sources of media that may be available on a personal level. Too often, social media tools available go unused based on the feedback of others. In order for educators to find true benefit, it is best they explore tools such as this one on their own. By exploring the social media tools at least once on their own, they will see if there are other uses for that tool that will best suits their educational needs.

Virtual Worlds and Gaming

The route social media is taking will not only make learning more effective, but also it can allow students to explore things not directly at their fingertips. According to Petkov and Rogers (2011), “classroom climate and teacher interaction are two of the most crucial roles in how well students are motivated. Students need to be motivated for the students to want to learn in school (p. 9)”. They go on to further discuss how educators need to look into what motivates students and that gaming may play a big role in how students are motivated to learn. Petkov and Rogers (2011) state, “The number one source for entertainment of 12-17 year old students was video games. 97% of American teens play video games with 50% of them playing at least once a day (p. 9)”. They note that the primary purpose behind using gaming in education is to make educational content appealing to students. The article also discusses how a research study done by the Mayo Clinic in 2009 indicated that instruction with video games yielded a 40% increase in student learning over traditional lecture instruction (p. 11). Gaming can have a benefit in the classroom and Petkov and Rogers (2011) make it a point to note that only serious games need to be integrated in the classroom. There are a lot of web and computer based games that can provide basic skills, but may not challenge students enough to benefit from the content. Petkov and Rogers (2011) state, “serious gaming will give a well-balanced instruction which contains the desired educational material as well as the motivational boost that is needed” (p. 12). It is important that educators carefully select games that will benefit their students and meet instructional goals.

One form of gaming that can enhance the learning experience involves virtual worlds. The use of virtual worlds helps students explore many areas outside of the physical classroom. Virtual gaming also allows students to be able to interact and collaborate with

students from all around the world. The tool, Second Life, is a virtual world site that is continuing to evolve. Bugeja (2008) describes Second Life as a place “in which avatars (digital characters) lease islands for real-life purposes-to sell products, conduct classes, do research, hold conferences, and even recruit for admissions (p. 18)”. As Second Life continues to evolve, it is opening up a lot of doors for students and educators to see more aspects of the world. Virtual world gaming, such as Second Life, allows students to tour special landmarks that they may not have the accessibility to see.

Dembo (2008) mentions how Second Life is best suited for educators and professional learning. He states, when teachers become accustomed to interacting in virtual environments, they can “leverage the technologies as they become increasingly available (p. 51)”. He further discusses how virtual workshops are great tools for teaching teachers because they allows teachers to collaborate face- to-face even when a physical meeting is not available. Virtual worlds also provide a fun, interactive environment to keep students engaged. With social media having such an impact in our daily lives, it makes sense that it is incorporated into the all forms of the classroom to some degree. With the freedom to explore and learn how to conduct and explore real world matter, this site can be beneficial for all ages.

Preparing Educators for Social Media Use

Educators can be prepared early in their programs for tools like the ones mentioned above by having practice within their programs. Lee and McLoughlin (2010) state, “A social framework for learning is achieved by designing conversation and participation within a community to ensure that there is mutual accountability, as members attempt to create and negotiate new meaning”. Allowing pre-teachers to engage with a community of individuals

like themselves will help them with learning and implementing these tools more easily when they do go into the field. Berg, Berquam, and Christoph (2007) state, “The goal for all of us in higher education is to identify where a good opportunity exists and to use that opportunity to make something happen” (p. 32).

Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) discuss how social media should be implemented in three levels of pedagogical framework of social use at the university level. Level 1 should consist of letting students self-explore social media on their own. Instructors should allow them to freely use social tools such as blogs and wikis, and create a Personal Learning Environment (PLE) to engage in self-regulation and self-monitoring tasks. At level 2, instructors should have students engage in social collaborative activities. This consists of students being required to comment on the blogs, wikis, or PLEs of their peers and instructor. At the 3rd level, students should be encouraged to use social media to synthesize and aggregate information from level 1 and level 2 in order to reflect on their overall learning experience (p. 6).

In their study, Lee and McLoughlin (2010) focus on building and supporting social software. They used a restricted network of pre-service teachers who were in a post-graduate program in teacher education. There were 19 teachers in this cohort that ranged from ages 22 to 43. They all had bachelor degrees in areas other than education. They all had different comfort levels with technology. These participants were in a 4-week practicum where they had to “incorporate specific web technologies, including text and voice formats into their student teaching instruction” (p. 22). The students shared their experience within the program by using social software tools that made them see the benefit of incorporating those social technologies into their instruction. Lee and McLoughlin’s study shows that even though

these educators were at different levels technologically, they were still able to gain knowledge and proficiency with using social media tools. This knowledge would ultimately lead to helping them understand how to incorporate those tools in their own classrooms.

On the opposite end, while the Lee and McLoughlin study focused on pre-service teachers and how they acquired knowledge to use technology and social tools effectively in their instruction, Lei (2009) tackled his study in a different manner. Lei (2009) sought the digital natives that were coming into the teacher education program and wanted to use their knowledge to see what technology preparation really is needed for educators. The participants in this study were intake freshmen entering a northeastern College's 2007 teacher preparation program. This was an age-based study that focused on the beliefs, attitudes, and technology expertise of these new freshmen. Lei (2009) states,

“Given the facts that digital natives, as students, are already playing an active role in using technology, it seems reasonable to expect them to be more ready to use technology for teaching as pre-service teachers than previous generations of teachers” (pg. 88).

The participants in this study used all types of technologies including, social networking sites, blogging, online chatting, emailing, and using the internet for any personal need (i.e. reading a newspaper, or surfing the web for entertainment).

These studies examined the ability to effectively integrate technology into teacher preparation programs comparing both students who considered themselves “digital natives” and those who had various technology skill levels ranging from low to high. The studies found that even the students who considered themselves digital natives had to be taught how to effectively apply these tools into teaching. Although these students may have used the social media tools like blogging, Twitter, and Second Life, they still lacked the concept of how to use these tools in education.

The digital natives ended up being on the same level as their other peers in teacher education since both groups had to be shown how to apply these social media tools into education, regardless of prior technology experience. Both studies by Lei (2009) and Lee and McLoughlin (2010) both showed that although these were two separate teacher education programs, they accomplished the same goal, by exposing the students to new social tools that they could use in their future classrooms. All teacher education programs may not be the same, but many are shifting their focus to help prepare future teachers to be more technology savvy and use social media in their instruction.

According to Berg, Berquam, and Christoph (2007), “to put social networking technologies to work in a positive and constructive way, campus professionals need to think about how to connect ideas, capitalize on their strengths, and find efficient ways to provide flexible and meaningful services” (p. 33). This article further details how students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison gave feedback regarding new technologies that could aid in keeping students’ attention. Students gave responses on how aspects of social tools like Facebook, YouTube, Wikis, LiveJournal, Flickr, and MySpace would provide them benefit in their academic life. They soon discovered that implementing these social media tools allowed the school as a whole to be more effective in tending to the students’ needs and helping them understand and value new technologies.

Benefits of Social Media

Blankenship (2011) discusses the benefits of incorporating all forms of social media into teaching programs to help faculty of all ages use social media on the same level. The article states that “80% of 1000 nationwide teachers surveyed revealed they use social media in some capacity as a part of their teaching” (p. 40). Many new and veteran educators have

used interactive community focus tools such as Skype, YouTube, and Facebook and Twitter. However, with more exposure to other social tools, many were able to expand the way their subjects were taught. Once exposed to other social media tools outside of the main interactive tools mentioned above, “52% of educators admitted to using online videos, podcasts, blogs, and wikis during class time” (Blankenship, 2011). Results suggested that with “thorough training of social media tools, even older faculty (those with 20 years or more of teaching) felt they used social media just as much as their younger co-workers new to the field” (p. 40).

With all of the factors that affect a teacher’s choice to stay in the field, technology use is a major concern that makes or breaks these decisions. Fulton, Glenn, and Valdez (2003) mention how their study found that teacher preparation of technology training reduced first year teacher attrition in 2000-2001. The study states that, “Almost 1/3 of all teachers have left after the first three years. Without support, they lose heart, burn out early, and are deeply disappointed not to be able to achieve their dreams of making a difference in children’s lives” (Fulton et al p. 12). This study was conducted prior to the time that the bulk of social media programs surfaced. This study identifies the need to understand technology on a basic level. From there teachers can expand their knowledge and decipher what social media tools are a best fit for their students.

Students in the teacher education programs can have an edge when entering their classrooms if they are given time to use these tools within their program communities. Mines (2009) discusses how the biggest challenge is convincing students who are strongly against using social technology to give it a try. He describes how hard it was for Champlain College professor, Elaine Young, to get her college students to try Twitter on an educational level. As

hesitant as they were, she soon found that throughout the course, they became more engaged in using the site and contributing to the classroom community. She found that even after the course ended, students continued to post tweets to the course.

Fernando (2011) discusses how universities are allowing the presence of social media into their programs. He mentions how Purdue University faculty realized that, when it came to implementing the social media into their instruction, they had to “Work with technology, instead of against it” (p. 12). That may be with the reason why many institutions are hesitant to use social media. They often find it harder to implement on a larger scale with many students, but they need to look at the benefits and incorporate it into their instruction that way. With the right motivation from faculty, the tools to use social media can be easily be acquired by students to help them as they move into the workforce.

Social Media's Effect on Teacher Education

Social media can be a benefit to teacher education if incorporated throughout the whole program. All students may not use every social media tool in their career as an educator, but hands-on experience with each tool can help students figure out what tools they can use more effectively. According to Davis (2010), “Social networking can mean using ready-made platforms already established, but it can also be about networks that schools create specifically for their students” (p. 16). Allowing students to learn about these new technologies within their programs helps them understand what tools can make their career successful.

Davis (2010) further discusses this by stating that the exposure of these technologies within teacher programs helps future educators get questions answered about the tool. They also have the ability to work with the tool and trouble shoot in problem areas they may

encounter when they use the tool. This will help educators have a better comfort level with using these social tools and be able to incorporate the tool better within their teaching.

Social Media Fosters Collaboration

The use of social media in teacher education programs has provided more benefits to new teachers entering the work force. The use of social media in these preparation programs gives new teachers the opportunity to collaborate and work with colleagues. Ewbank, Foulger and Carter (2010) detail a study centered on using Facebook in the college of education for a doctoral program cohort. They mention how the cohort created a Facebook page to be able to have rich conversation. They go on to state that as a result of doing this, “Students talked back and forth, sharing information on assignments and events and discussing the nature of education as a profession” (p. 27). So there are ways to incorporate social media in a way that supports the students in the program. This results in having more confident and well-prepared teachers with support systems as they enter the work force.

Jackson (2011) states, “Social media allows teachers to manage social anxiety and create a safe learning environment where everybody learns”. She goes on to say that social media, when used as a teaching tool helps students, “learn from experts around the globe as well as teachers down the hall” (p. 40). This provides a great benefit in teacher preparation programs, since veteran and new teachers can both use media for themselves as well as their students to enhance learning.

Jacobsen and Forste (2011) discuss how in their study it was found that relationship strength plays a major factor in electronic media interaction between individuals. Some students choose not to speak up in a physical classroom setting for fear of not having others agree with them. The researchers studied college students’ online communication and they

discuss how college students' online communication is stronger with offline interactions. They explored what forms of social media resulted in better relationships amongst students. Their study did find that the type of social media used in classrooms does matter.

According to their study, gaming did not influence students' social life as much as weekly forums and blogs (Jacobsen and Forste, 2011). This is important to know because it shows that social media is a bridge that can help tie together the overall goals of a teacher preparation program, if the right ones are used. They also discuss that the use of the tools should be used to aid with relationships obtained in the physical classroom. With students working together physically, it allows them to feel more comfortable communicating in an online social manner, which aids in fostering a support network.

Advantage of Social Media

Social media has given an advantage to those individuals enrolled in teacher preparation programs at a distance. Knowing that many people work full-time and may be going back to school to get their teaching certification, the current social media resources have changed many teaching programs. With a bulk of students now exploring the options of online learning, faculty in teacher preparation programs can use the social media tools available to teach the class. This provides extended benefit for those teaching or planning to teach in the classroom.

In online courses, the opportunity to use social media tools is endless. Individuals can meet online in various ways, whether it is through chat, video chat, Second Life, or other social sources available. Classes can also be constructed where students have to complete certain assignments that are based on using social media. For example: online classes can make use of Twitter, giving students exposure to blogging, and incorporating VoiceThread

and other social tools. While this is typical in an online environment, social media can be incorporated just as easily into any traditional classroom environment. Schachter (2011) states,

“We can’t afford to fly in an author to talk to students, but we can tweet him and ask questions, or if you’re talking about pyramids the teacher can look up and choose from over 18,000 personal videos from people’s vacation-like a virtual field trip” (p. 31)

For example, Young (2010) describes how Purdue University created software called *Hotseat* which allowed students to submit questions during class using either Facebook or Twitter on their cellphones or laptops. He states that, “Students seem to love the chance to make their voices heard in class without having to actually speak. About 75% of the students made use of *Hotseat* even though it was not required” (pg. 10). This social tool allowed the professor and his assistant to see any questions that were coming in during the lecture so that he could take time to address them. The article describes how this tool did a lot of good for the class. It kept students engaged and gave those students with insecurities a voice to feel comfortable in their course. In teacher education programs, each teacher has his or her own style and approach to being an educator so social media can help him or her identify their strengths and areas of weakness.

Lei (2009) states, “They [pre-service teachers] viewed technology as an indispensable component of their daily lives and they strongly believed in the potential of technology to help teaching and learning” (pg. 92). He further details how these students continued with their social networking profiles and embraced web 2.0 technologies such as wikis, blogs, and podcasts as future classroom tools. Final feedback provided from students shows that even though students have basic technology skills, they still needed the tools to apply their knowledge in a classroom.

At this point in life, many new college students have some sort of history using various forms of technology. Lei (2009) states, “Today a typical 21-year old has on average, exchanged 250k emails, instant messages, and phone text messages; and has spent 5k hours playing digital games, 10k hours of using a cell phone, and 3500 hours online” (pg. 88). This is important to note because educators have to understand what level their learners are at digitally to be help them learn and apply tools to their classroom.

Erickson (2010) states that according to the U.S Department of Education, “The goal is by 2020, to raise the proportion of college graduates and close the achievement gap so that all students graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and careers” (pg. 30). This is where the need for educators to have faith in technology comes in so that all students have a fair chance at having a better future. It is also important for educators to be aware of what technologies work better with each specific course. Lei (2009) states, “Teacher preparation programs need to emphasize the use of subject-specific technologies to help preservice teachers integrate technologies that can help them teach subject content” (pg. 92).

Social Media’s Effect on Learning Partnerships

The effects of social media on learning partnerships can be divided into two parts. Those parts include how they are affecting 1) the student-teacher relationship, and 2) the teacher-parent relationship. Once these two types of relationships are solid, all parties involved, teachers, students, and parents can have an understanding of what goals and objectives are expected. The studies examined show that social media does have a benefit to the learning process and partnership for all parties: teachers, students, and parents. Nielsen (2011) states that social media can consist of a “Host of inquiry-based activities that can be

used to foster evaluation, comparing, identifying, discussing, explaining, and exploring” (pg. 45).

Student-Teacher Partnership

Researchers at the University of Minnesota conducted a study that found that social networking did provide a benefit to the learning partnership between students and teachers. In this study reported by Science Daily, the researchers found that with the new social technologies, even low income students with little to no access to technology outside of school, are now just as proficient as the rest of their peers who have constant access to technology outside of school, going against what previous results had suggested (Univ of Minnesota, 2008). This makes it easier for teachers to work with their students on a common level when introducing new technologies.

In this study, the researchers found that of the students observed, 94% used the internet, 82% went online at home, and 77% had a profile on a social networking site. The article also stated that students stated the top reason for using these sites was for enhancing their technology skills. Researchers at the University of Minnesota collected data for over six months from students ages 16-18 in 13 urban high schools in the Midwest. They found that, due to the basic technology skills, educators were able to partner effectively with students on a level that aided in overall learning.

A partnership in learning is effective when a community and sense of accountability is given. Lee and McLoughin (2010) state, “Learning is achieved by designing for conversation and participating within a community to ensure that there is mutual accountability, as members attempt to create and negotiate new meanings” (p. 21). With a

common understanding of accountability, students and teachers are clear on expectations, which allow the completion of class objectives to be better.

Social media provides a new way for students to construct their identities (Jackson, 2011). He describes how the teens who were studied molded their personalities by using a social network. It is noticeable how much more vocal friends and family can be on a social site compared to how they would normally be in a physical setting. There are people who are more successful in finding their voice via social networking than in the classroom. Jackson (2011) points out that by using social media in the class, educators can use this as a way to identify their students' individual identities and formulate their instruction in a way that will benefit all students' learning styles.

There are many factors that coincide with incorporating technology in order for it to be a beneficial experience for both the students and teachers. There are many social tools available such as: social networking sites, voice thread, podcasts, blogs, wikis, and many other web 2.0 technologies that can enhance learning (Schachter, 2011). According to Schachter, teachers in the district are focused on "the connections made possible through tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as collaborative writing and editing tools like Google Docs and Edmodo" (p. 27). These tools, unlike a basic chat, allow students and teachers to have consistent feedback and continue to collaborate as long as it takes. These social media tools give teachers immediate access to their students' responses and provide a quick way for them to reach back out to their students.

Erickson (2010) states, "The 21st century classroom that incorporates media integration and experiential/simulation based learning provides students with opportunities for personalized learning plans as well as competitive edge" (p. 31). In order for social

media integration to be effective, educators must understand what tools will work better for their particular classes. These tools allow students and teachers to create a partnership dependent on all parties participating and being a part of the learning community.

The introduction of social media has opened a new level of communication between teacher and students. Davis (2010) discusses how a North Carolina school district took part in a grant funded program called *Project K-Nect*. This program allowed the use of smart phones as teaching tools that allowed students to instant message their classmates and teachers with questions at any time, day or night. Outside of asking questions related to class work, students could also use their devices to post questions and answers to math blocks or to help other students work through algebra problems. Some students were even creative enough with their phones to post a video to the blog showing how to solve a problem. This school district took a tool that is a primary need in many students' lives and allowed the teachers to use that tool as a means of engagement and motivation. Davis (2010) describes how there were guidelines regarding proper cell phone etiquette for both students and educators to follow; but this tool ultimately brought students and their teachers together. It gave both parties a sense of comfort in regard to asking for help and feeling secure in knowing their questions will be answered (p. 17).

Teacher-Parent Partnership

Building a stronger relationship with students via social media use also opens the doors for teachers to connect with parents. Kidwai and Imperatore (2011) discuss how social media allows student work to be visible to all audiences at the educator's discretion. Allowing parents to be able to view their student's postings and projects on the social media

sites can keep teachers and parents on the same page. This can lead to teachers having better success at planning and implementing objectives for their students, with the help of parents.

Kidwai and Imperatore (2011) discuss how the tool, HootSuite, allows educators to manage multiple social networks at once. By using these tools, educators can control social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, Foursquare, and Word Press by controlling the scheduling functions (p. 39). With these scheduling functions teachers can plan future posts, review statistics, measure generated tweets, and allow parents to tap into the learning environment to see what has happened and what the future plans are for the students. Tools like this help keep the lines of communication open for the students, teachers, and parents if they want to track the information.

The article by Davis (2010) discusses the importance of educators including parents when they choose various technologies to implement in the classroom. She discusses how the idea of keeping in touch with parents changed the professional life of an educator at New Milford High School. She discusses how the educator looked into Twitter as a means to keep in touch with parents. According to Davis (2010), after the educator began tweeting to parents for a few months, he found that he got “new ideas and resources, the ability to forge new relationships, and used twitter as a means of public relations” (p. 16). This intrigued parents and kept them interested in knowing what plans would be in store in the classroom for their students.

Davis (2010) mentions how including the parents on Twitter led the educator to host other events within Twitter to further stay in touch with parents. She states, that the educator used “EdChats”, which are “one hour conversations that took place every Tuesday that were based on a particular topic” (p. 17). Parents were welcome to join in this forum to view the

content being discussed and even chime in if it was a topic about which they felt strongly. These weekly chats became popular and even if students and parents couldn't meet for the live chat, they could always go back through and look at the Twitter stream to recap what was discussed and later follow up with the educator if they needed to. This style of open communication provides parents with a sense of trust and mutual partnership when it comes to having a say in their child's learning. Tools such as this not only help parents bond with the educators, but also allows them to see what their child is contributing to the learning environment. This ensures that parents, teachers, and students can all be on the same page when it comes to planning goals and objectives.

The studies reviewed have outlined how social media enhances the learning partnership. Not only is this partnership beneficial to students and teachers, but it also fosters a relationship between the parents, students, and teachers. Social media can help to keep all of these parties on the same page academically, which can result in better motivation for students. This strategy for learning keeps the door of communication open so that students know what is expected of them and parents can work with educators to help achieve objectives.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this reviewer believes there is a benefit to teacher education programs incorporating social media knowledge. From the literature, it is clear that better preparation with using social tools provides more comfort and stability for future educators. If more teacher preparation programs allowed their students to explore the many social media tools, the gap with technology for teachers will close a bit. This can be done in education, but if an educator does not have adequate knowledge of the tools he or she is using, he or she will not be able to use it effectively for their students.

The article by Erickson (2010) forecasts that, in order to achieve unified teaching, the learning model for this century needs to be powered by technology in teaching to improve overall education. Not only can teachers become proficient at using the sources of media available to aid in learning, but also they will have enough knowledge with these tools to fully plan classroom goals and assess students. Social media has a place in teacher education. It is up to the discretion of each individual educator on what types of technology he or she believes are acceptable in their classrooms. Billiot (2011) & Rivero (2011) both display what tools are available and how they can be used in the classroom based on age level. Once school administrators can be confident in allowing teachers full freedom to explore these tools, the use of social media in education could expand in the future.

Using social media can have a positive effect on teacher education. The studies by Miners (2009) and Blankenship (2011) confirm the need to prepare teachers to use technology and identify a common benefit that social media provides-- collaboration. Preparing students to use these different technologies in their programs alleviates the fear of incorporating social media that many new teachers may face. By having experience with

social media tools, educators can feel more comfortable using social tools and continue to expand upon the new technologies being presented.

Overall the use of social media is an effective way to improve the partnership between teachers and students. Using social media in education can capture students' attention and help them learn in a new way. Using technology can be quicker and can be an ideal way that helps students with opening up more to their educators (Jacobsen and Forste, 2011).

The manner in which learning is presented has come so much further than the traditional chalkboard and textbooks. The use of smartphones in classrooms really demonstrates how far schools and districts have come. Inventions of tools, e.g., laptops, iPads, eReaders, and smartphones, allow students more opportunities to expand their knowledge. They no longer have to discuss a topic, leave it in the classroom each day, and return to school the next day with any questions over the subject. As Young (2010) reported in his study, the use of the *Hotseat* application allowed students to use their mobile phones in class to foster discussion. With these new types of educational tools, they can continue to build upon their knowledge, even after the school, and find solutions to questions or problems that spark their interest. As students know more about the things that interest them, they become more confident to speak up and share new information with their peers.

A recommendation for future research is to explore and track how many new teachers in these teacher preparation programs receive thorough training in social media. Among those pre-service teachers who receive training, it would be interesting to see how it helped them mold their class routine. It would also be interesting to know what effect being taught social media had on the learning outcomes of their students. There is a lack of research that

specifically looks at social media use in teacher preparation programs. There is a wealth of information regarding social media in education in general, but it does not show data and trends comparing teachers in the field based on whether they received social media training. In the future, studying what specific social media tools are better to use in the classroom and provide the most benefit would be beneficial to first year teachers. Many educators are using Twitter because it allows short responses and feedback to keep students engaged (Billiot, 2011). It would be interesting to see what other factors motivate teachers into using certain technologies.

What social media has to offer in the coming years should be something educators, students, and parents should envision. With the tools we have now such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google Docs, Second Life and many more, teachers will see the benefit in using these tools in class Ewbank, Foulger, & Carter, (2010). By gaining experience with using these tools, educators can develop more concrete learning objectives and challenge their students in different ways.

Social media can strengthen the relationship between the teacher and his or her students by allowing students more opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in different ways. When students feel comfortable in displaying their knowledge, their true academic potential can be exhibited, which can result in better learning performance. This will ultimately allow students and teachers to have a closer bond and be able to effectively partner on their educational goals for better learning results and a promising future.

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