



Professional Faces: Pre-service Secondary Teachers' Awareness of Issues of Self-disclosure on Social-networking Sites

Erin A. Mikulec
Illinois State University

An important component of teacher education is the emphasis on what it means to be a professional in the field. Teacher educators must help pre-service teachers recognize that what may be acceptable in their lives now may not be when they are looking for their first job or once they are in the classroom. One such issue is the use of social networking websites, such as Facebook, and how the information that teachers post can affect them as professionals. This paper discusses the results of a study of 68 pre-service secondary teachers and their understanding of the impact of self-disclosure on social networking as future educators. The results suggest that while pre-service teachers found many of the issues at hand to be common sense, they developed a deeper understanding of the ramifications of unprofessional self-disclosure on social networking sites after being presented with a number of case studies and examples.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, secondary education, social networking, teacher education

As social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace continue to become a larger part of daily life, pre-service teachers must be aware of how to manage their use of such sites as they transition from student to professional. A fundamental element of responsibly managing one's social networking page is an understanding of the professional and societal expectations of secondary teachers. In general, we expect teachers to be role models for their students both in the classroom and in the community. Although some might consider certain activities "typical" of the undergraduate experience, such as drinking alcohol and engaging in wild behavior, posting narratives and photos of such activities in a public space such as Facebook does not promote a professional image.

However, it is the matter of what users post and share during their time spent on social networking sites that has raised concern as stories continue to appear about teachers who have been fired or suspended for such

actions. Therefore, it is important that pre-service teachers begin to think critically about their own personal use of Facebook, what they post, and what it means for them as they exchange student life for that of a professional teacher. The purpose of the present study was two-fold. First, it sought to establish a level of awareness of pre-service secondary teachers of the impact on them as future educators of self-disclosure on social networking sites such as Facebook. Second, this study aimed to develop this level of awareness further by providing the pre-service teachers with an intervention of articles and examples of specific instances of self-disclosure by practicing teachers, who in some cases were dismissed from their positions.

Facebook as an Educational Tool

Facebook is a social networking site that allows users to create a profile, network with friends, post and share pictures and videos and join various common interest groups (Ewbank, Foulger, & Carter, 2010). A

number of studies (Baran, 2010; Bosch, 2009; Charlton, Devlin, & Drummond, 2009; Lim, 2010; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Selwyn, 2009) have looked at Facebook as a teaching tool in a variety of educational contexts. Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, and Witty (2010) found that in a higher education setting, students were more inclined to view and use Facebook as an instructional tool, whereas faculty viewed it more strictly as a means of social interaction.

There are, however, concerns about the use of social networking sites as educational tools when it comes to middle and high school students. While some believe that social networking sites are useful tools to connect students worldwide, the need to monitor students' activity and safety in such environments must not be ignored. For example, Couros (2008) asserts that teacher control over the social network site specific to a class is imperative and that "creating and administering a private social network is an excellent method for establishing safe social learning environments" (p. 22). The notion of "digital citizenship", defined as learning, understanding and practicing appropriate behavior online is quickly becoming an issue that teachers may need to include in their curriculum. Weaver (2010) states that it is necessary for students to learn digital citizenship because "All the privacy settings in the world will not protect, if you share information with 'friends' who pass it on. Teenagers need to be conscious of the need to be protective about what they share" (p. 28). Villano (2008) discusses the importance of creating good digital citizens and stresses that educators must show their students how the rules of responsible behavior translate into the virtual world.

Facebook, Teachers and Professionalism

Although many would agree that there is a critical need to teach students about digital citizenship, what about educators? As Hur and Brush (2009) discovered, some online communities can be excellent tools for professional development for teachers in terms of sharing ideas and communicating with other professionals. In fact, they concluded that the anonymity that online environments provide is helpful for teachers to reflect on difficult situations since their online counterparts are neither personally nor emotionally invested in them the same way a colleague might be. However, pre-service and in-service teachers are also participating in social networking sites on a personal level and it has begun to create issues and questions surrounding appropriate professional behavior.

Over the past few years there have been numerous reports of teachers having been dismissed from their jobs or disciplined for pictures or comments posted to their social networking sites (Collier, 2012; Melancon, 2012; Malinconico, 2012; Norfleet, 2012; Nott, 2012; Solocheck, 2012). These reports have sparked a national debate as to what is professional and appropriate for

teachers to post to their personal social networking sites, at home and after school. While some instances of self-disclosure are clearly inappropriate, Turley (2012) points out that in some cases, teachers are being disciplined and even fired "for perfectly lawful behavior during off-hours." In response to what would appear to be a never-ending string of such cases, states and school districts are scrambling to develop and implement policies and guidelines for employees to follow. In Iowa, the Waukee Community School District's Proposed Regulation 413.18: Employee Use of Social Media includes points such as not accepting current students as "friends" as well as not to post information that could be considered confidential about the school district, students, alumni or employees. The document also states that employees are expected to "consider whether a particular posting puts your professional reputation and effectiveness as a District employee at risk" (Waukee Community School District, 2012). The State of Missouri went so far as to pass a bill that "banned electronic communication between teachers and students, but the legislature revised the law after a judge warned it infringed on free speech" (Gutierrez, 2012). With districts trying to catch up to the technology with policies and guidelines, teachers must be even more mindful of what they post, or what friends post for or about them, as the courts now try to make legal sense of it all.

Ethical and Legal Issues

There are numerous implications for understanding the ramification of self-disclosure on social networking sites when it comes to pre-service teachers entering the profession. As Carter, Foulger, and Ewbank (2008) point out, "whether we like it or not, teachers are held to a higher standard of moral behavior than is the population in general" and that "as new teachers enter the profession, they are just as accountable as veteran teachers for decisions related to professional conduct" (p. 684). Principals and those in charge of hiring new teachers are also beginning to use social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace to find out more information about applicants. In a study of school administrators, Sluder and Andrews (2010) found that 33% of the participants had searched for an applicant on social networking sites during the hiring process. Furthermore, 87% of the participants cited that "pictures of alcohol consumption, nudity, those that are sexual in nature, and using obscene language were all considered factors that might negatively impact an applicant" (p. 79). Again, this raises the issue of privacy, however, as some pre-service and in-service teachers have discovered, privacy goes out the window as soon as someone posts information to a public forum. As Elzweig and Peebles (2009) report, Stacy Snyder from Millersville University in Pennsylvania, "was dismissed from her job as a student teacher at a high school and denied her teaching credential when officials from the university were made

aware of a photograph and a post on her MySpace.com site” (p. 27). The case went to the Supreme Court, which ruled that Snyder posted the image and caption as a public employee, and therefore, First Amendment protection did not apply to the case. This has left administrators at the state and school levels scrambling for policies to establish guidelines for teachers when it comes to social networking sites. For example, Estrada (2010) discusses the Elmbrook School District of Wisconsin and the state of Missouri, who have both enacted policies banning student-teacher communication via social networking sites.

The issue of free speech and privacy versus professional conduct on Facebook and MySpace is also becoming part of a larger legal discourse. Two terms in particular, exemplar and nexus are often at the heart of this discussion. As De Mitchell, Eckes, and Fossey (2009) argue,

teachers as exemplars are held to a higher standard of personal conduct than the average citizen because of their relationships to students. Their actions away from school are judged as if their conduct would set an example for how students should act. (p. 68)

While certainly no one would argue that teachers are in fact role models for young people, there is debate about at which point a teacher is still a private citizen and entitled to conduct his or her life privately without it becoming a reflection on him or her as a professional. De Mitchell, Eckes, and Fossey (2010) point to the 1969 case of *Morrison v. State Board of Education*, which ruled that an employer, namely a school board or district, could punish or sanction a teacher for conduct away from school only if it interferes with the teacher's ability to perform his or her job duties or the learning environment. In other words, there must be a certain degree of equilibrium between a teacher's professional and personal life. As the authors state, this “nexus seeks, in many ways, to balance competing legitimate interests – the private life of a teacher and the school district's strong interest in protecting the school community” (p. 75). After reviewing a number of cases also related to teachers and social networking sites, Fulmer (2010) supports this idea of nexus when she concludes that:

although it reasonable to expect teachers to behave in a professional manner when they interact with students, it is unreasonable for teachers to be subject to professional discipline for their private behavior when the conduct for which they are disciplined is in conformance with all applicable laws. (p. 30)

Therefore, it would appear that not only school districts are attempting to draw a line between the personal and professional lives of teachers, but lawyers and policy makers as well. Where then, does this ambiguity leave teachers and at what point should this

discussion become part of their preparation? As Russo, Squelch, and Varnham (2010) suggest, “student teachers should be informed that in light of their professional duties such as preparing lessons, teaching classes, grading papers and attending faculty meetings, they will be treated as employees rather than students” (15). While student teachers certainly must be made aware of these expectations, their first day of work should be neither the time nor the place to begin to consider them.

Facebook and Pre-Service Teachers

In response to a warning from the Ohio Education Association (OEA) about teachers' use of Facebook, Kist (2008) interviewed pre-service teachers about their own activity on social networking sites. He found that many of the pre-service teachers were largely ignoring the advice put forth by the OEA that stated “Teachers who make inappropriate postings on Web sites risk losing their licenses or facing other punishment” (Associated Press, 2007). These pre-service teachers felt that their personal privacy should not be up for debate simply because they were going to be teachers. Interestingly enough, Kist also found that some of the pre-service teachers interviewed admitted that while they would keep their social networking sites once they become teachers, they would carefully assess and remove any possibly questionable content. Nonetheless, pre-service teachers who are transitioning from student to professional must not ignore the impact that information posted on Facebook and MySpace can have. Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, and Hughes (2009) found that all 119 participants in their study “agreed that Facebook fueled gossip and rumors, but they seemed to see this as mere side-effects of their Facebook usage and not as a main component” (p. 97). While this may suffice on a college campus, in the professional world, especially in the field of public education, this “mere side-effect” can have drastic consequences. Peluchette and Karl (2010) found that undergraduates-

who were OK with either their family or employers seeing their profile, compared with those who are not, were significantly less likely to post inappropriate profile content and to portray an image that would be considered sexually appealing, wild, or offensive. (p. 33)

These findings would suggest that undergraduate pre-service teachers are aware to some degree that what they post on social networking sites can indeed affect their future employment. Furthermore, Karl, Peluchette, and Schlaegel (2010) found that U.S. students were more likely than their German counterparts to post risqué or professionally inappropriate information to their social networking sites. They go on to speculate as to whether or not this trend would continue once the students begin their professional careers. Miller, Parsons, and Lifer (2010) describe a “posting paradox” in their study that

found that although undergraduates are uncomfortable with potential employers seeing their Facebook pages, they continue to post inappropriate content that those same potential employers might see. They concluded that, “students appear to know what they should be doing, but their behaviors do not reflect this knowledge” (p. 381). They also found that freshman tended to post more inappropriate content than did seniors in college and hypothesized that as the time for finding a job draws nearer, students are more likely to be conscious of what they post.

In a study of over 300 pre-service elementary teachers, Coutts, Boyer, Dawson, and Ferdig (2007) found that nearly half of them provided their full residential address on their Facebook page. Furthermore, the participants “readily provide information via Facebook on topics traditionally off limits in traditional classroom settings (i.e. religious views, political affiliations and sexual orientation)” (p. 1939). They concluded that teacher educators must address with pre-service teachers that what they post is and can become public. Olson, Clough, and Penning (2009) studied the public profiles of over 400 pre-service elementary teachers and coded the information as inappropriate, marginal or appropriate. They found that when one of the researchers discussed some of her concerns over what she had seen with her pre-service teacher students, they “became angry that a professor had been viewing their profiles” (p. 465). The researchers went on to conclude that the participants in their study “who posted inappropriate items on Facebook clearly did not consider that their conduct outside of their school-based experiences had anything to do with their role as a teacher” (Olson, Clough, & Penning, 2009, p. 466).

Both of these studies focused on pre-service elementary teachers, however there is a lack of similar research for pre-service secondary teachers. Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2009) found that college freshmen who viewed the Facebook page of an instructor (created by the researchers) with high levels of self-disclosure, viewed the instructor as more competent, trustworthy and caring. However, given the professional and societal expectations placed on teachers, high levels of self-disclosure from a high school teacher may not have the same favorable effect. This is especially true of new secondary teachers who are traditionally no more than several years older than some of their students. The need to differentiate themselves from their students is critical in establishing classroom authority and developing a safe environment conducive to learning. However, new secondary teachers may feel that in order to do this they must appear to their students as “cool” and “laid-back”. The idea of interacting with their students on Facebook and MySpace may seem like a good way of doing just that. Furthermore, secondary teachers will likely be involved as faculty sponsors or coaches of school clubs,

organizations and teams and therefore could view the use of Facebook and MySpace as a means of effectively communicating with students. Piesing (2007) however, states that using Facebook could lead to a loss of face or control in the classroom since such online interaction can blur the lines between teacher and friend. It therefore becomes imperative that teacher educators begin to help pre-service teachers understand the ramifications of using Facebook, both personally and as a professional educator.

Method

In order to understand the participants’ awareness of teacher self-disclosure on Facebook, the researcher developed the following guiding questions for the study. For the purposes of this study, the researcher determined that it was necessary to understand the starting point of the participants in terms of awareness of the complex nature of teacher self-disclosure on social networking sites in order to provide a comparison after the intervention. For this reason, the researcher designed the pre-intervention survey to gather a general understanding of teacher self-disclosure and to what degree the participants had even considered it a factor in their transition from student to professional.

1. As pre-service secondary teachers transition from student to professional, how do they view the personal and professional use of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace?
2. How aware are pre-service secondary teachers of the potential consequences of posting inappropriate material on a personal social networking site?
3. How do these views change given an intervention of readings and class discussions about real-life examples of the issues associated with teachers using social networking sites?

Participants

The participants in the present study were 68 sophomore, junior and senior undergraduate secondary education students at a large Midwestern university during the fall semester of a course on general secondary instructional methods and assessment and one section of an introduction to secondary education course in the spring. The content area specialty for the participants included, but was not limited to, English, History, Biology, Chemistry and Agriculture. For the majority of the students enrolled in the fall semester courses it was their final semester prior to student teaching. For all of the students enrolled in the spring semester course, it was their first teacher education course in a sequence of three.

Procedure

The participants were all students in the researcher’s courses on the introduction to teaching and general secondary methods. The intervention surveys, readings and class discussion were part of the regular course activities. There was a 100% rate of consent among the participants. Although the participants received class points for completing the assigned

activities, in order to minimize coercion, all intervention survey responses were anonymous. While participants did provide their name in order to receive credit for completing the online intervention surveys, the names were not linked in any way to the actual responses. For the in-class discussion, participants were randomly assigned to groups and they submitted their written responses as a group, without names. To minimize the risk that the instructor-researcher would recognize students by their responses, the data were not analyzed until one month after final grades for the courses were submitted.

Given no previous research in this area, the researcher developed the pre- and post-intervention surveys as well as the in-class discussion questions. The surveys were piloted in another section of the general methods course prior to the intervention event in the researcher's section. Both intervention surveys and the in-class discussion questions can be found in Appendices A and B.

Pre-intervention. The participants first completed an online pre-intervention survey in which they responded to questions about their personal use of Facebook and MySpace as well as open-ended questions about the use of such social networking sites by secondary teachers. The pre-intervention survey consisted of three questions regarding the participants' use of social networking sites as well as their current privacy settings and one open-ended question about the participants' views on the use of social networking sites by teachers. The researcher kept this initial question general so as not to lead the participants in any one direction and to gauge the issues that the participants thought of with prompting. Following the open-ended question were 14 Likert-type items that focused on more specific issues of teachers use of and self-disclosure on social networking sites, such as whether it was a good way to communicate with students and if a teacher is personally responsible for what they post to their page on their own time away from school.

Intervention. After the pre-intervention survey, the participants read several articles that detailed various issues surrounding the use of Facebook by in-service teachers, ranging from dismissals because of posting inappropriate content or pictures, discussions about privacy and emerging school policies. The participants read seven articles in all. The first article by Simpson (2008) is a synopsis of a number of teachers who faced disciplinary action because of photos or comments they had posted to their MySpace or Facebook pages. Another article by Steffenhagen (2008) told the story of a Canadian principal who was suspended and investigated as a child abuser because of a nude photo of him on a beach, taken by his wife while the two were on vacation. The participants also read an article (Henry, 2009) about a school in Houston that was just beginning to tackle the

fallout in the classroom that resulted from comments made about teachers and students on Facebook from home. Two other articles (Helms, 2008; Clasen-Kelly, 2008) focused on the ongoing investigation of a Charlotte-Mecklenburg teacher who had posted comments about her students on Facebook and the ensuing debate of teacher privacy in the face of societal expectations of educators. The final set of articles described a warning issued by the Ohio Education Association (eSchoolNews, 2009) and the actual warning itself (Ohio Education Association, 2009).

The participants then engaged in a guided a one-time in-class discussion about the articles and completed a post-survey at home. The participants completed these activities as part of a regular class assignment for which they received points; regardless of whether or not they consented to having their responses used in the study. Since professionalism was a major topical component of both courses, the goal of the in-class discussion was to provide the participants with the opportunity to recognize the importance of being mindful of what they post as they move into student teaching and eventually into the classroom. The discussion took place in small groups of three to four students in order to give all participants an opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas.

Post-Intervention. Following the class discussion, the participants completed the post-intervention survey online outside of class. In this final measure of data collection, the participants were asked how their views of secondary teachers using social networking sites had changed. The participants also responded to the same 14 Likert-scale items a second time in order to assess how the intervention influenced their beliefs about specific behaviors and topics related to secondary teachers using social networking sites. As with the pre-intervention survey, the participants' responses were anonymous.

Data Analysis

The researcher compiled the data and looked for patterns in thinking in the pre- and post-intervention responses, as well as changes in the ideas about and perceptions of secondary teachers using Facebook and MySpace. The researcher performed a content analysis of the free-response data to find common themes and issues among the participants and to determine how their ideas and beliefs about teachers using social networking sites had changed as the result of reading the articles and engaging in the class discussion. Working within the framework of symbolic interaction, defined by Patton (2002) to mean that "human beings act toward things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them" and that "the meaning of things arises out of the social interactions one has with one's fellows" (p. 112). In the present study, the meaning that social networking sites such as Facebook hold to pre-service teachers may be affected by how they view themselves as students or

emerging professionals and that a shift in this meaning may come about as the result of discussing it with their peers.

Results

Table 1 shows responses to the questions about the type of account the participants had and their rate of usage. For this study, the researcher defined usage as accessing the site and participating in the account through posting comments, responding to or “liking” comments or photos, sending messages or chatting with friends. The results indicate that the participants in the study were active users of social networking sites, primarily Facebook, with 85% of them being regular users by accessing and participating in their social networking sites at least once a week. The participants in this study therefore had sufficient experience with social networking sites to engage in the study. These data indicate that the participants knew how the sites work and were able to give informed opinions on its use. Furthermore, these data are consistent with similar findings of usage. Pempek, Yevdokiya, and Calvert (2008) found that undergraduate students spent at least thirty minutes per day on Facebook while Aghazamani (2010) found that of 595 students polled, 81% connected to the site more than once a day and 74% of them spent more than one hour a day using it. Research done by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) showed that of 219 undergraduate and graduate students,

65% of them access their social networking sites at least once a day and often more than once to look for new messages and posts. Furthermore, Hafner (2009) reports that Facebook’s 350 million members “collectively spend 10 billion minutes there every day, checking in with friends, writing on people’s electronic walls, clicking through photos and generally keeping pace with the drift of their social world.”

Pre-intervention Survey Free Response Questions

The pre-intervention survey indicated that many of the participants felt cautiously optimistic about using Facebook as a private citizen. After reading the responses to the pre-intervention survey question “What is your view on the use of social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace by high school teachers?” the researcher identified four common themes among them. For example, 65% of the participants reported that the use of social networking sites by high school teachers is acceptable so long as they maintain a high level of professionalism and good judgment in the management of their pages. Some of the ways they identified maintaining professional behavior included keeping privacy settings set to the highest level possible, not posting or allowing inappropriate content and that teachers not “friend” students. The participants qualified their responses with the following:

Table 1
Social Networking Site Accounts and Usage

Account Type	n=68	Usage			
		at least once a day	three to five times a week	once a week	rarely
Facebook only	.84	.43	.26	.16	.15
MySpace only	--				
Facebook & MySpace	.13				
Neither	.03				

I think teachers have to know how to allow only certain groups of friends to see certain things like photo albums.

I believe high school teachers can have a Facebook but it is highly inappropriate to be "friends" with students. It crosses a personal and professional boundary.

Another 38% of the participants felt that the use of social networking sites would be appropriate for communicating with students so long as they maintained a professional page separately from a personal one. The participants viewed the use of a social networking site as a potential tool for communication with students to remind them of upcoming assignments or as a means for students to speak with their teacher outside of school if they have questions about homework. The participants also stated that pages on such sites could be maintained for clubs or sports teams.

It could be a good tool to have if you worked with a club at school and wanted them to create a Facebook page for it.

I plan to keep the one I have now but make a new one for my students to remind them about homework and things.

The participants also indicated awareness of the potential issues that could arise from the use of Facebook and MySpace. For instance, 37% of the participants stated that teachers need to understand the possible hazards associated with the personal or professional use of such sites, particularly when it comes to photos that are posted online. The participants indicated that even with high privacy and security settings, their professional image could be tarnished by not only what they might themselves post, but also what others may post about them. They also indicated that ultimately it is the responsibility of the individual to carefully monitor such settings as well as posts in which they are tagged or identified and that there is always the possibility that students, parents and administrators may still view them.

It is important to remember that students, administrators or parents DO find them sometimes.

Any teacher that made it through college and found a job should have the sense that high school students will try to find out as much personal information about their teacher as possible.

Foulger, Ewbank, Kay, Popp, and Carter (2009) state that "teachers are sometimes asked to adopt a higher standard of conduct than the regular public because of their position" (p. 17). These results indicate that the participants recognized this very idea and that they must be aware of what they are posting to their pages and how it can reflect on them as teachers.

The final common theme was that of teachers simply not placing themselves in the situation of having the contents of their social networking site come back to haunt them. Of the participants, 15% felt that the use of social networking sites with students is not appropriate under any circumstances. The participants stated that the use of such sites to communicate with students was simply a risk not taking and that it blurs the line between being a friend and being a teacher. While the participants did see the value in using the internet to communicate with students about their class, they recognized that there are other tools for doing this where there is no danger of personal information being conveyed by either teachers or students.

Facebook is for private lives outside of school. If a teacher wants to communicate with the class through the internet they should use BlackBoard or wikis.

Not smart. I'll delete it once I start looking for a job. It's a big waste of time.

Post-intervention Survey Free Response Questions

Based on the common themes gathered from the pre-survey responses, the participants in the study clearly had some strong opinions on high school teachers using Facebook and MySpace both privately with friends and family and as a means of communicating with students. The post-intervention survey results indicated that after reading the articles and discussing them with classmates, their views on teachers using Facebook were either substantiated by what they had read or that their views had changed and that they now had more things to think about than before. In the post-survey responses, 35% of the participants indicated that their views had not changed and that they still believed as public figures, teachers must take care to portray a professional image even in their lives outside of school. Furthermore, the participants stated that it was simply a matter of common sense and that if there is the slightest question about whether or not something is professional, it should not be posted at all.

I feel basically the same, if a teacher is going to have a Facebook or a MySpace they have to exercise the utmost care and privacy.

I can't say my opinions changed that much. I still believe that as teachers we should be role models but at the same time, we should be allowed to live our own lives.

Other participants, however, stated that reading the articles and discussing them with classmates did have an impact on their views of high school teachers using Facebook and MySpace both privately and professionally. For example, 65% of the participants reported that the articles and the discussion presented them with new issues to consider. Many of the participants reported that they had not been aware of the serious consequences to their employment as a result of posting inappropriate material

on a personal social networking site. The participants also acknowledged that while one's privacy settings are set to the highest level possible, there is no guarantee that posts or photos remain private. Furthermore, the participants stated that reading and discussing the articles made them more aware that teachers are held to higher standards in terms of professional behavior and attitudes.

I am a lot less sure that it is okay for teachers to use Facebook. It is too dangerous, something could go wrong and you could lose your job.

I am surprised how quickly people were fired for comments that are similar to comments that may occur in the school's hallways or cafeteria. I guess once you put it out there it can't be taken back.

This is consistent with Foulger et al. (2009) who found "a contemporary struggle for pre-service and in-service teachers alike regarding a clear code of teacher conduct in a networked world" (p. 13). The results indicate that pre-service teachers do in fact want to know what schools expect from them and what the rules are as these issues continue to develop in the educational community. Foulger et al. (2009) also discuss the social contract, which they define as "requiring the agreement of all members of society or not allowing a social practice even when one person does not agree" (p. 10). When joining and participating in a social-networking site, users may be under the impression that what they post will stay within the context of their "friends" and "wall", especially since they have chosen who will see and have access to such information. However, the researchers remind readers that Facebook and MySpace are in fact privately owned and that "participants give up their rights to the information they post by agreeing to be part of this online community" (p. 16). In their study, they found that all but one of the participants in their study failed to address the issue of social contracts connected to social networking sites. Neither did this arise in the present study, save the one student who commented that some of the remarks that teachers made and were fired for were in many ways no different from what teachers might say to one another.

Perhaps one of the most interesting results of the post-intervention survey responses was that 35% of the participants voluntarily took action in regards to his or her own Facebook or MySpace account. This was neither a requirement of the class assignment nor the research study. What's more is that of the participants who voluntarily made changes to their social networking sites, more than half of them were in the third and final course of the sequence and were closest to student teaching. For these participants, the reality of their professional life truly beginning, rather than being an abstract topic of class discussion, had a more meaningful impact on their interpretation of the readings. The participants reported that they had a better understanding of what was

inappropriate within the context of being a public school teacher and that they would need to be more careful in the future about what they posted. In addition to updating privacy settings, a number of participants also reported removing their last name from their profile in an effort to add another layer of security.

I deleted 200 pictures when I got home. I was probably being paranoid about some, but I don't want to take any chances now.

Knowing some of my friends, I wouldn't put my job on the line just so they can make an inappropriate joke. I told them to clean it up and even deleted some.

Discussion

The present study sought to identify pre-service secondary teachers' awareness of the potential hazards of posting to social networking sites as they transition from the role of university student to that of professional educator. Given the numerous incidents that have been reported, and the consequences that some teachers have faced as a result of posting pictures or comments to social networking sites, it is important that pre-service teachers have a clear understanding of the expectations placed on them not only by students, administrators and parents, but by society as well.

To return to the guiding questions of this study, as pre-service secondary teachers transition from student to professional, how do they view the personal and professional use of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace? The pre-intervention survey results showed that most of the participants in the study demonstrated a strong level of awareness of the issues and professional ethical concerns associated with secondary teachers using social networking sites in both their personal and professional lives. For the most part, while some participants felt that the use of social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace were for the private lives of teachers, some also indicated that there was the potential to use them as tools in the classroom. For example, some participants indicated that maintaining a Facebook page for a teacher's class could be a valuable tool for communicating with students about assignments or as a way to provide extra help outside of class. The participants also reported that they understood the need to remain "professional" at all times. Nonetheless, the participants' definition of professional was somewhat limited in terms of what exactly is considered "professional" when it comes to pictures and comments posted on social networking sites.

How aware are pre-service secondary teachers of the potential consequences of posting inappropriate material on a personal social networking site? This awareness increased in the post-intervention survey questions after reading the articles that described real-life accounts of incidents involving teachers and social networking sites. Of the articles read, the participants

focused heavily in their discussions on the principal who was suspended and investigated as a pedophile because of a picture his wife had taken of him on a nude beach while on vacation. While the participants agreed that his wife did not use good judgment in posting the picture, they were concerned at how quickly parents and the community were to jump to the conclusions that he could potentially act inappropriate with students because of it. While the participants acknowledged that some teachers that had been fired or disciplined had not been professional in their comments or pictures that they had posted, they began to understand the moral standard to which teachers are held by the public. Many of the participants reviewed their own Facebook and MySpace pages and reported that they suddenly understood how some material could be construed as unprofessional and made changes to their privacy settings and removed certain items. While initially the participants stated that they believed it was acceptable for teachers to maintain social networking pages in their personal lives, they were also able to more clearly define what it meant to represent oneself as a "professional" at all times.

How do the views of pre-service secondary teachers towards the use of social networking sites change given an intervention of readings and class discussions about real-life examples of the issues associated with teachers using such sites? Again, the participants identified the need to represent themselves consistently as professionals but still thought that such sites could serve as an effective means of communicating with students so long as the teacher maintained a professional page that was separate from their personal one. One issue with this approach that the participants did not raise is that although a teacher may maintain separate pages, they cannot assume that students will do the same. In other words, if a teacher creates a Facebook or MySpace page for his or her class, the teacher and all of the teacher's "friends" are still privy to the information posted by students, as it will appear on all the friends' newsfeeds. This means that everyone linked to that teacher's page, whether or not the content relates to the teacher's class, will see all information, comments and photos posted there. The teacher now finds him or herself in a situation in which he or she must decide how to act upon information posted to the page that affects his or her learning environment. The level to which teachers and schools are responsible for what students say online away from school is still under legal development. The question of guidelines for appropriate conduct and the legal ramifications surrounding the cases discussed in the study also helped the participants to understand how far-reaching these issues are. Many participants expressed concern that some districts would go so far as to say that as an employee teachers are not even allowed to have a personal social networking page. It also became clear to the participants that the issues are present at school,

district and state levels and that administrators and lawmakers alike are scrambling to reconcile these issues and to develop and implement policies to address them. Many of the participants reported that this made them feel somewhat uneasy; that they would not want the lack of clear guidelines for them to follow once they were hired to result in any kind of disciplinary action.

As the results indicate, pre-service teachers need to engage in discussions about these current and emerging issues. By presenting students with current examples and case studies, teacher educators can further develop pre-service teachers' sense of professional ethics and help them to understand fully the reality of becoming a secondary teacher in the digital age. Furthermore, teacher educators as well as pre-service teachers need to stay abreast of developing policies created by and instituted in school districts as these issues continue to evolve. By doing this, pre-service teachers can begin to understand that once they are hired, it is their responsibility to know and act in accordance with school and district policies when it comes to social networking sites. It is important to remember as teacher educators that while our students may come to us tech savvy it is still part of our responsibility to show them how to best practice these skills in the workplace.

Limitations

This current study has several limitations. First, the sample size of the study was limited to two sections of one course and one section of a second, which consequently makes generalizability difficult. While this study focused on pre-service secondary teachers, future work needs to expand to include pre-service middle school and junior high teachers in order to assess the needs of these populations as well. Another limitation is that the majority of the participants in this study were nearing the end of their teacher preparation, making it important that pre-service teachers who are earlier on in their coursework consider these same issues in order to develop an awareness of professional issues as soon as possible. Therefore, this study needs to be replicated with a larger sample size of pre-service secondary teachers. And, given that privacy settings are constantly changing on Facebook and MySpace as are district and even state level policies, it is imperative that future work take into account these new and ever-changing phenomena.

Another limitation of the study is the instructor-researcher factor that could have contributed to the 100% rate of consent participants to use their responses from their class assignments. While this has been addressed in the methods section, it is important to reiterate the all of the online responses were anonymous and that the participants working in groups and submitting written responses as a group and without names minimized the risk of recognizing participant responses in the in-class discussion portion. The researcher did not analyze any

data until one month after final grades for the courses had been submitted.

A final limitation to the study is the issue of test-retest, in which the participants remembering their pre-intervention survey responses when completing the post-intervention survey could skew the responses. Although there was a lapse of one week between the pre- and post-intervention surveys, for the purpose of this study, it was important that the participants be able to reflect on this information in order for the researcher to gauge the impact of the intervention. Nonetheless, a direction for replicating this study in the future would be a longitudinal study of the effects of the intervention, which would reduce the impact of carryover.

Conclusion

The results from the present study suggest that before reading the articles and discussing them in class, the participants were aware to some degree that what teachers say and post on social networking sites should be matter of common sense. Yet, after reading and discussing real life cases, the participants became more aware of the gravity that such actions can have on one's professional career, whether intentional or not. Furthermore, the participants came to understand that these issues are not localized to a personal level, but rather also to the district and state levels as more organizations are working to develop policies and guidelines in response to them.

Given the continually changing landscape of the educational environment, both in schools and online, pre-service teachers must be aware of how their words and actions made public and in print through social networking sites can affect them now and in their future classrooms. Understanding and presenting a professional self in public is an integral part of the transition from student to teacher and must be addressed in teacher educator programs. The issues that have arisen from teacher self-disclosure on Facebook is not simply limited to ethical behavior on the part of adults who interact daily with children, but are now also the basis for a number of legal cases, which are in turn impacting public school policy. These policies will be in place when pre-service teachers enter the profession and all faculty, both novice and veteran, are expected to understand and adhere to them.

In a secondary setting, the age difference between new teachers and students is considerably less than in an elementary situation. In order to be taken seriously as an authority figure, new teachers must make every effort to distinguish themselves as the adult in the room. To accomplish this, pre-service teachers must have a clear definition of professionalism and the expectations that come with their job title. Part of this definition is the understanding that what may be acceptable to them, and others, as an undergraduate student, will not be acceptable as high school teachers. This process begins well before a

new teacher is hired and it is no longer sufficient simply to tell pre-service teachers what they should or should not post to such sites, or to assume that all pre-service teachers and teacher educators share the same definition of common sense. Teacher educators must rather engage pre-service teachers in meaningful dialogue about what society and the profession expect from teachers and how these expectations manifest in both the virtual world and the classroom. This dialogue must center on current events taking place in the field in order to provide pre-service teachers with concrete examples of the potential issues surrounding teacher use of Facebook and to create a dialogue about how to navigate them.

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Appendix A

Pre-Intervention Survey Questions

1. Do you have a Facebook or MySpace Account?
2. How often do you update your status or post comments to your Facebook or MySpace page(s)?
3. Which privacy setting is currently active on your Facebook or MySpace page(s)?
4. What is your view on the use of social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace by high school teachers?

Post-Intervention Survey Question

1. After discussing the articles you read before class, how have your opinions about the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace by high school teachers changed? Explain.

The follow questions were administered pre- and post-intervention and discussion using a Likert scale.

Strongly agree (1) Agree (2) Neutral (3) Disagree (4) Strongly disagree (5)

1. Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are a good way for high school teachers to communicate with their students.
2. High school teachers cannot be held accountable for anything they post on Facebook or MySpace on their own time using their own computer.
3. High school teachers should never use Facebook or MySpace to communicate with students in any way.
4. School districts have the right to deny access to Facebook or MySpace to teachers and students on school computers.
5. If high school teachers want to use Facebook or MySpace to communicate with their students, they should maintain a separate page that is used only for that purpose.
6. High school teachers should always be careful not to post any pictures or content on their personal Facebook or MySpace page(s) that could show them in an unprofessional light.
7. If a high school teacher has a personal Facebook or MySpace page, and the privacy settings are at the highest level, there is no way anything he or she posts could be seen by students, parents or school administrators.
8. School districts have the right to ban any and all teacher-student interactions on Facebook and MySpace.
9. A high school teacher cannot be held accountable if inappropriate content is posted on his or her personal Facebook or MySpace page by a non-work-related friend.
10. If a high school teacher chooses to use Facebook or MySpace to communicate with students, he or she must establish rules and guidelines with students for the use of that page.
11. A high school teacher cannot be held accountable for content posted to his or her personal Facebook or MySpace page by another teacher or work-related friend.
12. It is okay to use Facebook applications such as YoVille or CafeWorld with students because it develops positive rapport that will carry over into the classroom.
13. A high school teacher cannot be held accountable for any content that he or she posted under a high privacy setting that was not observed by one of his or her online friends.
14. It is appropriate for high school teachers to use Facebook or MySpace as a means of communicating with the parents or guardians of their students.

Appendix B

In-class Discussion Questions

1. What was your initial reaction to the articles you read? Which one most surprised you?
2. Discuss the District of Elmbrook's decision to ban the use of social networking sites between teachers and students. Is this policy justifiable? Why or why not?
3. Discuss the suspension of Principal Clessen. What questions do you have regarding this case that aren't addressed in the article? In your opinion, was the case handled fairly? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the case of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg teachers. Why do you think the teachers in the article would post these comments on Facebook? In your opinion, were these cases handled fairly? Was appropriate action taken? Why or why not?
5. Discuss the cases of the teachers in Colorado, Florida and Virginia. In your opinion, are these issues of privacy or professional conduct?
6. Discuss the warning to teachers issues by the Ohio Education Association. To what extent do you think this warning is necessary? In your opinion, is this good advice or common sense? Explain.
7. Why do you think that teachers engaging in social networking applications such as YoVille or CafeWorld with students might be considered inappropriate or unethical?
8. Reflect on your own social networking site page, or those that you have seen. Is there any content that could *in the least bit* paint you in a negative or unprofessional way if seen by students, parents or administrators? How will you manage your personal pages when you begin student teaching and your first teaching job?

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Erin A. Mikulec
Illinois State University
Campus Box 5330
Normal, IL 61790-5330
emikule@ilstu.edu

Dr. Mikulec is an Assistant Professor of General Secondary Methods at Illinois State University. Her research interests include the development of teacher identity, the teaching of classroom management and the use alternative clinical experiences in teacher education.

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