Modeling Professional Use of Literacy-Focused Social Media for Preservice and Inservice Teachers: Growing, Connecting, and Learning Together, Online

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Abstract
This summary paper shares key ideas from a 2019 TALE Conference panel session that focused on how the authors infused social media into literacy and technology teacher education courses at two public universities. Four teacher-educators share ways of leveraging various platforms such as Pinterest, Twitter, and YouTube to use as educational resources in higher education to, for example, save, search, and curate teacher resources, engage with educators around the world via educational chats, and provide instances of just-in-time learning for today’s busy students. Judiciously assigned, well-structured opportunities to use social media as a learning tool can augment teacher education which has traditionally been confined to university classrooms and field placement sites. Here, we offer ways in which preservice and in-service teachers can engage intentionally and with specific outcomes with a wide range of like-minded professionals.

Keywords: literacy, social media, teacher education, online learning, collaboration

This summary paper shares key ideas on incorporating social media into our literacy and technology teacher education courses. All four university-based teacher educators offer courses in multiple formats including face-to-face, blended or hybrid, and entirely online and are experienced in innovating with digital learning with preservice and in-service teachers. In addition, all of us use social media for our own professional growth, modeling the practice while learning alongside and with our students. Social media affords opportunities to engage students...
with one another, to critically engage with other students and professionals around the U.S. and globally, and to expand their professional learning beyond traditional textbook materials, hence fostering a broader discourse community than the brick-and-mortar or virtual walls of the classroom (Delello, McWhorter, & Camp, 2015). Below, we share findings from each panelist. The first teacher educator, Dana, shares how she uses the visually focused Pinterest application, an online and shareable bulletin board generating program, to foster knowledge sharing and curation in her technology integration course. Second, Kathryn shares how she uses Twitter, an online microblogging platform, with undergraduate preservice secondary teachers from multiple disciplines to foster their development of professional learning networks. Third, Annamary adds to the Twitter conversation. Fourth, Peggy discusses how she uses YouTube, a web-based video creation and repository platform, to create content and playlists that enable students to revisit specific and sometimes overlapping concepts in literacy learning.

We encourage literacy teacher-educators to first consider expansion of their own professional learning networks (PLNs) via social media to best model these networked and social learning practices. Trust, Carpenter, and Krutka (2017) suggest higher education professionals can curate resources for students in this way and, at the same time, foster their own professional growth. Social media integration can work for PreK-12 educators, literacy professionals, and teacher educators. Furthermore, Trust, Carpenter, and Krutka (2017) note that not all faculty make use of these platforms, and suggest that, as a field, there is room for growth in considering integration of social media platforms with teaching. While this information is organized to present practical and concrete ideas for teacher-educators; however, ideas gleaned are of use to all educators at all levels of teaching. These ideas can serve to help teachers expand their notions of ways that Pre K-12 educators can conceptualize their own professional development work outside of traditional approaches to learning and teaching knowledge development. Acknowledging that we are all at varied stages on the technology continuum, we present ideas for both the novice and the more tech-savvy educator.

**Pinterest: Curating Content and Finding Teaching Resources**

The educational technology course that Dana teaches is a requirement for undergraduate students seeking their bachelor’s degrees and educational certification in order to prepare them to effectively and consistently integrate technology into their lessons for their teaching careers. While most students in the course are experienced in using social media for personal reasons, they lack experience in transferring these skills to unlock the rich educational resources that are easily obtainable online.

Graduate students who have not yet taught in their own classroom and lack teaching experience are in a similar situation as the undergraduates. Within Dana’s classes, the students have widely varying abilities and comfort levels when it comes to technology. Some comfortably navigate multiple forms of social media and are on the expert end of the continuum, while others who are less savvy, use technologies such as E-mail and word processing only to meet course requirements.

These future teachers need a steady stream of teaching ideas as well as ample support in creating lesson plans that reflect positive, student-centered techniques of classroom management. The instructor finds and provides students with many online resources that are available free of charge. Students appear to willingly embrace these resources as they are introduced in the course. Furthermore, as they are taking courses, they are encouraged to start building their resources tool kits for their future classrooms.
Teaching students how to use these various resources begins with modeling. They are introduced to the resource, which in this case is Pinterest, located at http://pinterest.com. User-friendly and resource rich, Pinterest requires minimal instruction to use. Dana walks the students through setting up their own accounts and demonstrates how it is used, including searching techniques. Access to Dana’s educational Pinterest boards provide students with easily available models in courses such as Digital Learning, Online Teaching, and Technology in the Classroom. Students are encouraged to follow Dana’s account as well as those belonging to classmates. Some educational boards are recommended (such as x, y, z), but the students are able to make their own choices in creating their own boards and the ones they want to follow.

Curating resources is a much-needed skill for preservice and in-service teachers. They often will be drawn toward “pins” or, specific content on a Pinterest board that are visually appealing but may lack substance, or, the website to which these pins are linked may no longer be available. For this reason, learning to evaluate content is a key skill that students need for Pinterest and digital environments. Indeed, it is crucial that students be taught to both distinguish and choose quality educational content (Van Overbeke, Stefanick, Beach, & Christensen, 2015).

An excellent resource for using Pinterest in education called The Guide to Pinterest for Educators and is available at https://rossieronline.usc.edu/pinterest-for-educators/.

Twitter as Professional Development that Connects to Disciplinary Literacy Practices

Many teacher-educators have eagerly adopted Twitter as a way to support peer-to-peer learning, build community, and expand opportunities to connect to professionals (Amaro-Jimenez, Hungerford-Kresser, & Pole, 2016). Because so many teaching professionals use social media to connect with others in their disciplines, platforms such as Twitter offer teacher educators ways that help them connect their university students to more -- more than textbooks and classmates can provide.

Preservice teachers in Kathryn’s disciplinary literacy course are junior and senior undergraduate non-education majors seeking to add teacher certification to their disciplinary degrees. Because they come from a wide range of disciplines (art, music, physical education, history, English, math, science, theater, etc.), the disciplinary literacies they need to learn to teach are broad and varied. Each semester, in the early days of class, students struggle to see the value of what they consider a one-size-fits-all framework and believe that they are being asked to become reading teachers. They also arrive in class generally unable to articulate the disciplinary literacies in their own fields – defined as “the knowledge and abilities possessed by those who create, communicate, and use knowledge within the disciplines. Disciplinary literacy emphasizes the unique tools that the experts in a discipline use to engage in the work of that discipline, and the unique uses and implications of literacy use within the various disciplines.” (Shanahan & Shanahan, YEAR, p. 8). To help preservice teachers see the kinds of disciplinary literacies professionals use in their work, they are required to set up Twitter accounts as a way to curate their own PLNs. In doing so, they connect to professional organizations, such as NCTE, NCTM, and Shape America, that host educational chats and “tweet” relevant content as well as to individual members of those organizations, as they expand their networks.

At the first class meeting, we spend time discussing the Twitter project, and students helped one another to create accounts. They were then asked to search for relevant Twitter hashtags. For example, #teaching, #teacher, and #learning are good ways to find general information on education. More specific
hashtags such as #kidlit, #mathed, #scied, #ESL, #historyteacher, and #PEgeeks all lead to more content-specific topics.

Many professional organizations have Twitter accounts and share information through them. We spend time in the early class periods working in small disciplinary-focused groups to find organizations and people to follow. In the early weeks of class, there are additional assignments, such as to “retweet” something related to disciplinary pedagogy, or to new research in their field. They also learn to search for Twitter chats.

As the preservice teachers read posts in Twitter, they reflect on how these organizations and professionals use social media to share disciplinary conceptual knowledge and share teaching ideas. The preservice teachers then began Tweeting their own ideas, which served as a way to induct them as professionals into their disciplinary teaching fields. By the end of the semester, the preservice teachers build PLNs that not only provide them with an expanded idea of disciplinary literacy, but also show them that through social media, teachers have the power and ability to direct their own professional development.

Future plans include expanding the network tools beyond Twitter, so that the preservice teachers can build their networks through a variety of social media formats. Doing so will make this assignment more multimodal and allow the preservice teachers to see how different disciplines use social media in different ways.

Similarly, Annamarie’s students stepped into their own disciplinary networks by engaging in educational Twitter chats that occur synchronously at a regularly scheduled time. They reported learning about useful teaching tips and finding dynamic teacher-leaders to follow (Delello & Consalvo, 2019). Since many of her students will have teaching careers in rural areas, that they know about relevant PLNs peopled by similarly committed disciplinary experts, in online, free, and moderated settings (such as educational Twitter chats) increases the likelihood that they will continue to seek professional development into their teaching careers. Future plans include designing longitudinal research that follows these students into the first few years of their careers to determine whether and how they continue to engage in self-chosen professional development opportunities.

**Learning via YouTube: Microlearning-Style Media to Engage Specialized Literacy Professionals and Preservice Teachers**

Multimodal approaches to learning via YouTube can be a creative way to engage literacy professionals and preservice teachers alike. Traditionally, YouTube has a vast array of videos for viewing. Preservice teachers can be encouraged to think of YouTube as a place to also post their own original video content. Another feature of YouTube is the ability to curate videos into playlists around themes on a variety of topics such as: content-focused videos, author videos of children’s and young adult authors, and videos that demonstrate a specific literacy pedagogical technique.

When looking at ways I have used videos with advanced practitioners—teachers seeking a master’s degree in literacy education—I think of the examples of professional development videos on literacy learning. These videos include short lecture-style videos (microlearning), video series such as mentoring for advanced literacy practitioners, podcasts, and dialogue-style videos with other literacy-focused experts and colleagues. I have been creating original YouTube videos to model teaching with digital content since 2010. The purpose of the creation of my own original YouTube content is to implement a type of ubiquitous learning (e.g., as described by Kalantzis & Cope, 2010) through which teachers can get a more personalized type of learning about complex literacy topics or on mentoring topics. Indeed, YouTube can be...
accessible at anytime and anyplace as new media-based learning, and videos can even be created with something as simple as a mobile device such as a teacher’s hone or tablet device. In both my preservice teacher education and master’s level courses, I have created original videos and organize them in thematically focused playlists for students. The videos at the master’s degree (advanced practitioner) level are organized in the following ways:

1. Motivation and Mentoring videos. This series aims to help students see themselves as literacy leaders, even informally. In the video “Sharing Knowledge with Other Teachers,” I identify various traditional and non-traditional ways (e.g., social media) that literacy leaders can disseminate knowledge with others. These videos are more constructed as enrichment and add a “teacher presence” to the entirely online course.

2. Knowledge-based videos to build background knowledge. Video playlists help to build background knowledge for literacy educators who may need to build knowledge on a variety of literacy topics. Because I mainly teach elementary-literacy focused courses, I have been focusing on the technical topics of literacy learning such as beginning reading, and phonological and phonemic awareness. For instance, secondary-focused teachers and new teachers often need a stronger background in these areas.

In essence, the YouTube video series allows for building up of challenging areas such as phonics while also providing engagement with the instructor. Practicing teachers who are also working on graduate degrees benefit from these content-focused videos while also learning from the more advanced mentoring videos. Indeed, because the International Literacy Association (ILA) values leadership skills, it helps to model literacy leadership through videos. In ILA’s Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017 (ILA, 2017), Standard 6 states, “Candidates recognize the importance of, participate in, and facilitate ongoing professional learning as part of career-long leadership roles and responsibilities.”

YouTube videos are also used with undergraduates who are preservice teachers in an elementary literacy methods course. The videos that most benefit these students are focused on several types: 1) demonstration videos of literacy teaching 2) micro-lectures, which are short overview videos on a topic 3) long form webinar style videos on the basics of lesson planning and 4) dialogue videos where I discuss major literacy ideas with a more knowledgeable colleague. The dialogue videos serve to model the induction process whereby novice educators are learning how to have complex conversations with other educators about literacy topics. Thus, while learning content, teacher candidates are seeing an authentic dialogue. An additional type of video with preservice teachers is to record a panel of new teachers who are graduates of the program where they share advice on success with entering the teaching profession. This type of “group mentoring” video is supportive of beginning teachers in allaying fears as well as learning concrete ideas.

Future goals for developing YouTube include the following:

- Continue to make playlists of my own content. These lists can focus on a variety of literacy-focused topics and will also be shared via social media and in other open ways for a global reach to literacy educators.
- Building on ILA’s standard focusing on lifelong learning and leadership (standard six), encourage students to curate their own YouTube content for current and future learning. An additional goal is to also have students consider creating their own videos where they summarize a literacy concept or demonstrate a teaching technique. This would be especially useful for preservice
teachers as they prepare for teaching certification exams.

- Curate quality content for teacher candidates and advanced literacy practitioners.
- Encourage other teacher educators and teachers to create and develop their own YouTube channel. Create resources to help educators get started with this video creation process.
- Conduct more research and scholarship on YouTube as a learning tool for literacy educators. Disseminate findings in open access journals for broader reach.

Discussion

This summary paper provides a brief overview of several technology-based tools, specifically Pinterest, YouTube, and Twitter, that have been used to expand learning for preservice and in-service teachers. Students, including those who are “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) need professional guidance, instruction and support to try out these digital tools and to engage with them in professional spaces. Therefore, clear instructions, modeling, examples, and a risk-free opportunity to practice can help students successfully engage with other professionals on social media as productive experiences (Delello & Consalvo, 2019). As literacy teacher educators who teach across a variety of learning platforms, we seek to engage our students with new media literacies, multimodal literacies, and a chance to expand their and our own professional learning networks. Using social media tools also allows users to learn the skills of both critical and media literacy. It provides opportunities to critique the authenticity and accuracy of information publicly available while offering opportunities to discuss concepts such as “fake news” and the crafting of headlines. We encourage fellow educators at all levels to consider this dual mission of growing and learning in your own capacity as well as modeling and bringing resources to students while you encourage their own use of social media to expand their lifelong learning.

It is important to consider whether to begin with having students curate content, gather resources from social media (“read-only” mode), or to take the next step and have students be more interactive. If the interactive use of literacy-focused social media is the goal, consider having discussions about privacy, terms of use, digital citizenship (proper use of social media), and having options for students who don’t choose to participate.

We provide a few reflective questions to help you as you consider these techniques. The authors are all on Twitter and can be reached there, as well, to continue the conversation.

Reflection questions to consider:

- How have you seen social media used in literacy education with either pre-service teachers or practicing teachers?
- What are ways to get started, including taking baby steps, towards introducing these ideas?
- What do you see as the greatest value of using social media with pre-service teachers and what are challenges?
- If you currently use social media for your own professional networked learning and/or you use it with your teaching, what got you started using these tools?
- What is a social media tool you would still like to explore in the future or future goals? Is there anyone’s work you admire that you would like to incorporate into your own teaching?
References


