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SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AS A FORM OF VIABLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SECONDARY ENGLISH EDUCATOR

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SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AS A FORM OF VIABLE PROFESSIONAL

DEVELOPMENT FOR SECONDARY ENGLISH EDUCATOR

by

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Abstract

Social Networking Sites or SNSs have been used as a form of self-guided professional development (PD) by educators of all grade levels. However, there are limited students regarding Secondary educators using SNSs as a form of self-guided PD and there is also a lack of an examination of how those educators are using what the learn from SNSs within an English classroom. The purpose of this research was to determine not only what Secondary English educators seek on SNSs for self-guided PD but also if that what they learn is applied to their classroom practices and if they are successful. This study uses a mixed method approach with first a survey being sent out to Secondary English educators and from the survey participants were selected based on their social media usage and if they had tried what they learned from those platforms within the classroom. The survey was shared on social media and was presented at the 2024 South Carolina Council of English Teachers conference. The research revealed that not only do educators use what they learn in their classroom, but they also found some success. SNSs also fill the gaps left by traditional PD provided by the school and/or district level. Four themes developed during the interview process: adaptability, relatability, support and collaboration. One or more of these themes need to be presented within the content being presented or the professional learning community (PLC) for users to see the information as valuable.

Keywords: social media, professional learning community, digital learning community, professional development, social networking sites

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother who is no longer with us. While I know that she is not physical with us, I have felt her during this entire journey and know that the values, hopes and dreams that she instilled within me have allowed me to get this far in my life. My grandmother valued education even though her life took her in a different direction, and I am proud that I could do what she was not able to do.

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To my mother, who has been my support through this entire process and has helped me beyond what words can describe. Thank you for being therefore me no matter what mood I was in.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNSs) have grown increasingly popular over the last two years as the percentage of active users on these sites has grown by 20.51% (Vizcaino-Vedu & Abidin, 2023). SNSs are digital applications and websites that allow users the opportunity to interact with other users by creating, commenting, liking, or sharing content. COVID-19 brought to light just how impactful SNSs can be for educators who found themselves using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formally known as Twitter), and TikTok to learn how to navigate the sudden shift to online learning (Pokhrelr & Chhetri, 2021; Riady et al., 2022). SNSs being used as a form of professional development within the education field is not a new area of research as studies have been completed regarding how SNSs have been used as a form of self-guided professional development (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019). While scholars have shown an interest in examining how SNSs such as Facebook and X have impacted educators' professional development learning, there is limited research regarding the outcome of how educators are able to implement what they have learned in their classrooms effectively. Before examining SNSs and professional developments (PD) outcomes in the classroom it is important to have a basic understanding as to what SNS and PDs are. Social networking sites are sometimes referred to as social media sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SNSs are platforms that can be accessed using an internet connection that asks users to create a profile and connect with other users of the site (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Facebook, 2023; Instagram, 2023; TikTok, 2023; X Corps, 2023). The platforms require a user to create a profile before being able to fully engage with the platform effectively (Bissessar, 2014; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Users interact with content that is created by other members of the platform and these interactions can be done actively or passively (Damico & Krutka, 2018). Users can be actively involved in these digital

learning platforms by posting videos, images, comments or sharing their findings with others (Damico & Krutka, 2018). Those who produce enormous amounts of content on a regular basis with hundreds of thousands of followers are called influencers (Hartung et al., 2020). Those who are not active on SNSs, meaning they do not interact or share information with others, are classified as lurkers and will simply absorb information and use it to achieve their own professional goals (Damico & Krutka, 2018; Goodyear et al., 2019) Users of SNSs platforms who are passively involved tend to simply follow content creators (Damico & Krutka, 2018). Passive users will share content with those that they have a strong professional relationship with; these professional relationships tend to be those that are forms off SNSs and part of their in-person network of colleagues (Damico & Krutka, 2018). SNSs have provided a place for educators to share resources, support each other with various struggles, and combat the feeling of isolation much like professional developments strive to do (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019). SNSs are available as alternatives to traditional PD that places the educator at the center of their learning (Goodyear et al., 2019; Lou et al., 2020).

Professional development is an essential part of being an educator and these continuing education courses allow educators the opportunities to hone their skills and develop new ones to achieve academic goals that they have set for themselves as well as their students (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). Districts introduce new strategies and programs for their educators to use in the classrooms too, however, they do not try to introduce those ideas to educators in new ways. Traditional professional developments, sometimes called one-shot PD, are often hosted in large group settings, during the school day and are not set up to address the various content areas, grade levels, and learning styles of their participants (Alberth, 2018; Goodyear et al., 2019; Nelimarkka, 2021; Prestridge, 2019). When educators feel that what they are learning in

professional development does not support their needs and are unable to get support beyond the presentation, they struggle with trying to implement what they have learned in their classrooms. In some ways SNSs address issues that are found within traditional PDs.

Problem Statement

Traditional or one-shot PD courses are those created by the district, individual schools, or companies and are designed to help educators continue their educational journey by providing them with opportunities to learn how to improve their skills and support their students in the classroom (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019). While PD is essential for the growth of an educator, it is delivered with a one-size-fits-all approach and does not allow for collaboration beyond the initial meeting (Alberth et al., 2018; Prestridge, 2019; Macia & Garcia, 2018). The typical delivery methods, content presented, and time allowed to host PD, do not easily lend themselves to successful implementation in the classroom (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Nelimarkka et al., 2021; Prestridge, 2019). Due to the nature of how the afterschool PD is structured, there is not a lot of time for meaningful collaboration within the sessions itself due to time constraints and leaving little opportunity for professional support beyond the session (Macia & Garcia, 2018; Neilmarkka, 2021). Whereas online PD can be accessed when teachers need it and in a timeframe that works for them in their schedule.

As education moves into the 21st century, there are new forms of PD that are more content specific. Additionally, they are not restricted by time and provide opportunities for collaboration. SNSs are available as alternatives to PD that places the educator at the center of their learning (Goodyear et al., 2019; Lou et al., 2020). While there have been studies done to examine how SNSs are used to support professional learning and create a community (Bissessar,

2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019), there is a lack of follow-up to see how using SNSs as a form of self-learning translates to a classroom setting.

The purpose of this research study is to identify how SNSs are used as professional development for in-person teaching by examining those who actively use SNSs in this way and apply their knowledge to the classroom. By understanding the kinds of content that SNSs users seek out on these platforms and the most effective aspects of their uses, those who create PD can work on cultivating a new design approach to traditional professional learning.

Nature of the Study

The goal for this study is to determine how effective SNSs are when used as a form of self-learning PD for educators teaching in-person. The following research questions are designed to examine high school and middle school English teachers in South Carolina who use social networking sites to support their classroom goals.

1) In what ways do middle and high school English teachers use SNSs for professional development?

2) What is the appeal of using SNSs as a professional development tool for middle and high school English teachers?

3) How do middle and high school English teachers implement what they have learned from SNS in their classroom effectively?

4) What is effective and ineffective about middle school and high school English teachers' uses of SNSs for professional development and implementation in the classroom?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based upon social capital theory (Macia &

Garcia, 2018; Thomas et al. 2019). Social capital theory states that people create social capital

through their relationships and the knowledge, skills and experiences that are formed from those

relationships which develop an individual's human capital (Macia & Garcia, 2018). Strong or

weak relationships impact human capital. Relationships that are considered strong are those that

are created with close friends or those who you seek out when you need advice (Macia & Garcia,

2018; Mehreen et al., 2019). The relationships that are formed with those that you considered

acquaintances are considered weak (Macia & Garcia, 2018; Mehreen et al., 2019). Both types of

relationships are important when creating human capital. Within these professional learning

relationships, members can recognize who belongs to certain groups based on recognizable traits

that are established by members of the group (Macia & Garica, 2018). Human capital is the

knowledge and skills that one forms and the value that is placed on these ideas through the lens

of those within the same relationship groups (Macia & Garcia, 2018). For this study the social

capital will be those who are actively teaching in education and use social networking sites to

gather knowledge and create their human capital from the digital communities.

Operational Definitions

Social Networking Sites (SNSs). Social networking sites are either web based or application-

based communities that require users to create a profile to access the features the sites or

application provides (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Users can interact with these platforms in an active

or passive way (Damico & Krutka, 2018). For this study SNS are limited to sites or applications

that are free to users and do not ask for payment to access all levels of content for general users.

Traditional Professional Development (PD) or One-Shot PD. Courses created by districts, schools, companies, or conferences that provide information to help educators improve their skills and reach their goals in the classroom (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019). Usually conducted in person after school or during a common planning period.

Facebook. Facebook, like many other social media platforms, is free for users to create a profile that can be accessible to anyone who has access to the platform. Profiles can be made private or public (Bissessar, 2014; Nelimarkka, 2021). Facebook is built around users creating a network by adding friends, liking pages, and joining groups that support their needs or interests (Bissessar, 2014; Nelimarkka, 2021). The algorithm that this platform uses is designed to suggest friends and pages for users to interact with (Anderson, 2020). Users are able to create content in the form of status updates, where they can simply type a message or share pictures and videos with those on their friends list (Bissessar, 2014; Nelimarkka, 2021). Other users can comment on or share these posts and send private messages using the messenger feature. A recently new feature, Facebook Live, allows users to view a video that is being live streamed and interacting with the video by sending comments, like or hearts (Nelimarkka, 2021; Hartung, 2022).

X (Formerly known as Twitter). X is a social media platform site that allows users to create profiles and share status updates with other users. However, unlike Facebook, these status updates are limited in the number of words that can be posted at a time (Hartung, 2022). X has recently created a feature like Facebook Live where users can broadcast meetings and conferences in real time (Hartung, 2022). Users are still able to interact with those who are leading the livestream by leaving comments. It is important to note that at the time of this research study, X was free for general use.

Instagram. Instagram is similar to X but instead of posting status updates, users can post either pictures with captions or videos that are limited length (Anderson, 2020). Instagram also utilizes hashtags to make it easier for users to find specific content. This is not just a feature that is seen on Instagram; it is also seen on Facebook, X and TikTok (Anderson, 2020; Bissessar, 2014; Hartung 2020; Nelimarkka, 2021).

TikTok. TikTok is relatively new in the SNS community. This application was formerly known as Musical.ly and became popular in 2019 (Anderson, 2023; Hartung, 2022). TikTok allows users to view videos on a loop and users can comment, like, share or save their favorite videos (Anderson, 2023; Hartung 2022). TikTok presents one video at a time, which is different than other social media platforms mentioned where users can see multiple forms of content from different users on the screen at one time (Anderson, 2023). The algorithm that TikTok uses tracks the interactions of its users and provides content based on those interactions to the users' *for you page* (Anderson, 2020; Hartung et al., 2020). TikTok has been in the news earlier this year due to the concerns with data privacy and security. However, this has not stopped users from engaging with the platform (Anderson, 2023).

Hashtags (#). While each SNS has their own process for signing up and features for interacting on the platform, there is one overarching similarity that each of the aforementioned platforms share. Hashtags are a unifying feature of SNS that let users find content based on the hashtag keywords. For example, if a user of SNS would like to find information for teaching regarding classroom experiences, they may type #teacherproblems in the search engine to find related content (Hartung, 2022).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Limitations Regarding SNS

While educators have used SNSs as a form of self-learning for years, there are a few issues that need to be considered when researching how educators interact with these platforms. The first limitation is the fear that some educators have regarding losing their jobs (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). While SNSs do have settings that make the content users create and interact with available to a select group, they cannot control what those who have access to their profiles do with the information that they post. This can lead to information being shared with others that can result in disciplinary action (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). Educators not only seek out resources regarding content on SNSs but also will seek out information regarding teacher burn out, how to leave a job, or opinions on issues in education. This lack of control and fear regarding the content they seek out can lead educators to avoid interacting with these platforms regardless of if they feel they can find support. This has the potential to impact the demographic of a study that deals with SNS usages and the content that is interacted with on the platforms.

Another limitation of this study centers around how mindful educators are when they are interacting with SNSs. Those in the education field that use SNSs for their professional lives often use it for their personal lives as well. However, many people are not mindful of what they interact with which can impact their learning abilities and the content that they are viewing (Damico & Krutka, 2018). If users are not mindful of the content that they are engaging with, they may not apply what they are learning into the classroom or use inappropriate strategies. To understand how to use SNSs effectively, one must be able to actively reflect and be critical of the content being interacted with. On SNSs, certain genders and races dominate the conversation, therefore it is important for those who are using social networking sites as a form of self-learning

professional development to be cognizant of who they are interacting with (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019; Damico & Krutka, 2018). Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok and similar platforms were not designed with educators exclusively in mind, therefore educators may be presented with misinformation or individuals not accurately representing themselves. There is no third party to vet the information for quality and authenticity like a district or professional association would do. This requires the teacher to be a critical consumer. Those who are using these types of platforms for self-learning need to seek out various content creators to avoid hearing a single narrative (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). If an educator follows one community of content creators, they risk the possibility of hearing only one narrative which can have a negative impact in the classroom (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019).

This study is centered on educators who critically use social media sites as a form of self-learning PD with the assumption that what they are learning is used in the classroom. It is important to make sure that those who take part in the study not only use SNSs to gather information and resources but apply what they learn into their classroom. There is also an assumption that only the younger generation uses SNSs for professional use; to receive accurate data all ages and level of interaction on SNSs needs to be considered.

Significance of the Study

Traditional PD that are provided for educators today have a few design flaws that impact the purpose of their influence on teachers. PD as they are currently being presented do not allow for differentiation for those attending and rarely will provide the opportunity for collaboration beyond the PD itself (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019). For traditional PD that are often hosted by the school or a third-party consulted to be successful for educators there needs to be opportunities that allow educators to make connections and build relationships

with each other; this allows for a strong professional learning network to be established (Thomas et al., 2019*).* By providing a space for educators to have healthy discourse about the content presented in traditional in-person PD, educators can create a strong professional learning network (Thomas et al., 2019) beyond the initial meeting. These networks provide teachers with the opportunity to grow and improve on what they have learned in the PD. However, when educators are not afforded the opportunities to interact with each other, seek ongoing support, or have PD that are designed to reach their personal professional goals, they will seek out information elsewhere.

Research on SNSs has demonstrated that these platforms provide an alternative to traditional PD and address some of the issues that educators have with PD (Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019; Lou et al., 2020). SNSs are accessible twenty-four hours a day and users can find support that is specific to their needs and content areas (Lou et al., 2020). Due to educators being able to find and interact with content they believe is valuable to their growth, they can develop strong relationships and create a digital professional learning community that supports their self-learning journey. However, SNS are only beneficial as a form of self-learning professional development if they are a part of a reflective pedagogy practice (Damico & Krutka, 2018).

The area of SNSs as a viable form of self-learning PD should be examined in more detail as technology progresses in the 21st century. While there have been studies and literature reviews that examine various SNSs and how users interact with these platforms, there is limited information regarding how SNS as a form of PD impacts the classroom (Prestridge, 2019). By studying how and why educators use SNSs effectively for in-person teaching those who create

and administer traditional PD can work towards making the interactions and the content present meaningful.

By examining what SNSs are being used, however they are being used, and the impact they have on the classroom, we can determine if they are a viable form of self-generated learning (Prestridge, 2019). If we can determine the purpose for seeking out SNSs for learning, the content being used, and how it is being used in the classroom, the best approach to interact with SNSs for the purpose of self-learning can be created. SNSs can be overwhelming for those who use these platforms. Users can find them challenging to navigate; however, as further research is done to determine how SNS are being used in the classroom, we can teach healthy and mindful habits that can make these platforms a great support for educators.

Conclusion

This study is designed to examine how middle and high school English teachers interact with SNSs as well as how what they learn from these platforms are used in the classroom. First a profile needs to be created that examines the most popular SNSs that are being used by educators and the content that is being interacted with using a survey to gather the data. As the data is being analyzed, it will be examined to determine if there are any themes regarding content or content creators that users interact with. Once participants have been selected using purposeful sampling to have a variety of users, participants will be interviewed to determine the successes and failures of using SNSs as a self-learning PD for in person teaching.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptual Framework

Social capital theory is a concept that people are changing and adapting to reflect the climate of the social world and the reality of the times (Bourdieu, 1986). Although social capital tends to reflect the climate of the times, one of the features of social capital is the notion that relationships, and what one achieves in those relationships, builds their social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin & Lu, 2011; Vorhaus, 2013; Zuniga et al., 2017). One's social capital is not built by a series of natural or social occurrences, they are the result of both strategical conscious and unconscious decisions that can be made on one's own or as part of a larger group (Bourdieu, 1986). These relationships that are created whether, consciously or unconsciously, are maintained based on the knowledge, resources, and experiences that are shared among those in a network (Bourdieu, 1986; Vorhaus, 2014).

Social capital considers social networks and how those social networks come together and are maintained (Vorhaus, 2014). The social capital that is created can be the result of being born into a specific type of family, geographical location, employment, religion, shared interests, and/or organization affiliation (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Through the relationships that are built resources, knowledge, skills, values, and norms are shared among those within those social networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin & Lu, 2011; Vorhaus, 2013; Zuniga et al., 2017). The importance and availability of a resource, skill, knowledge, value, or norm is based upon the social group that it is found within (Coleman, 1988). Members that belong to the same group or social network can recognize one another based on the values or norms that they share (Coleman, 1988). For this study SNSs are the conduit in which social networks are built based upon the desire and intention of the user.

Professional Development

Professional developments (PD) are activities and interactions that help educators improve their pedagogical practices, extend their knowledge of the content they are teaching, as well as introducing new resources and curriculum (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Bissessar, 2014; Desimone, 2011; Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019). Through PD, participants can create relationships known as professional learning networks (PLN) which can act as a continue support systems for those that are a part of the community (Bissessar, 2014; Carpenter & Harvey, 2019; Prestridge, 2019). Those within the school system can address new educators' deficits by providing PD to help bridge the gaps in knowledge as often times new educators feel that college do not prepare them fully for being in the classroom (Bayer, 2014; Desimone, 2011). This type of continuing education can be presented in many forms such as: workshops, conferences, mentoring, and coaching as well as peer observations (Bayer, 2014; DeMonte & Center for American Progress, 2013; Desimone, 2011). These sessions can be formal or informal based on the delivery method of the PD (Patton et al., 2015). The goal of PD is to improve the quality of education by positively impacting educators' knowledge and practices to help support and increase students' growth and academic achievements (Albert, 2018; Bates & Morgan, 2018; Bayer, 2014; Desimone, 2011).

While PD practices have been a part of education for decades, there was a reexamination of both the process and the information presented during these sessions when The No Child Left Behind Act was introduced (Bayer, 2014; Desimone, 2011). The act reinforced the idea that PD should be of high quality and designed in a way that helps to support educators' growth and raise student achievement (Bayer, 2014; Desimone, 2011). However, it can be difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of PD because there is not a consistent idea regarding what are the most vital

components PD must address during the session to be considered effective. The varying

experiences that people have as well as a difference of opinion when it comes to PD has led

researchers to focus on how the educator fields about PD rather than if the information presented

in the PD has an impact within the classroom (Bayer, 2014, Desimone, 2011). While PD's goal

is to improve educators and thus the students' gain, there are some disadvantages that must be

addressed regarding PD.

While some educators find that PD are helping them within the classroom, there are those

that aren't as thrilled with the aspect of having to give up time to participate in PD (DeMonte &

Center for American Progress, 2013). Research has provided insight into one-shot or traditional

professional developments that are hosted by the schools, district, or conferences, indicating that

they are short and do not support the educators in a way that impacts the classroom (Albert,

2018; DeMonte & Center for American Progress, 2013). These insights have shown that PD can

be far too generic and lack real-life applications (DeMonte & Center for American Progress,

2013). Researchers have discovered that it is important for educators to see how they can

implement what they are learning in these meetings in their classroom and then have chance to

collaborate with others (DeMonte & Center for American Progress, 2013; Macia & Garcia,

2018; Neilmarkka, 2021). Within these styles of sessions, educators from various backgrounds,

content areas, and grade levels will be presented with the same type of information and there are

little to no discussions on how the content being present can be implemented in a specific

classroom setting (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Nelimarkka et al., 2019; Prestridge,

2019). While schools do host their own professional developments, there are times when outside

consultants are brought into the school. Educators are given limited access to these consultants in

a short amount of time and once the consultants leave, they do not typically return to provide

follow-up support (DeMonte & Center for American Progress, 2013). For PD to be successful, there needs to be time for educators to be active learners, have chances for meaningful collaboration, and provide follow-up opportunities to discuss the implementation of what they learned during the PD (DeMonte & Center for American Progress, 2013; Desimone, 2011; Macia & Garcia, 2018; Neilmarkka, 2021). Another disadvantage of PD centers on studying the effectiveness of the sessions. When studying the effectiveness of PD, for the purpose of improvement, there is no universal measurement in place to determine if a PD is successful, as individuals have different experiences (Desimone, 2011) and the needs of the educators can be vastly different based upon the geographical location of the school (DeMonte & Center for American Progress, 2013).

As education moves into the 21st century, there are new ways in which educators can take part in PD sessions that are based upon their interests, provide opportunities for collaboration beyond the presenting of the information, and have follow up support available after the presenter is finished. Social networking sites serve as alternatives to one-shot PD that allows the educator to be at the center of their learning experience (Goodyear et al., 2019; Luo et al., 2020).

Social Networking Sites

SNSs are platforms that are accessed either using a web browser or an application downloaded to a mobile device (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Mao, 2014). A more commonly known name for SNSs is social media. Users of these platforms are asked to create a profile to have full access to the general features the SNS have to offer. These profiles can be public or private (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Teachers that decide to use SNSs can be active users or passive users (Damico & Krutka, 2018). While SNSs can be used to create and maintain relationships, the way that the application is designed to go about this can vary from platform to platform. Platforms

such as Facebook, Tumbler, and Skype are designed to work as a form of instant messenger which leads them to be known as a social networking tool. There are SNSs that are considered social publishing or sharing tools platforms such as X, YouTube and Google Office; these types of platforms are designed for users to share photos and videos. Educational SNSs platforms such as Moodle and Edmodo are considered social and content tools that use extensions such as calendars and surveys. A final group that a SNSs can be classified as are those that allow users to create a virtual world or gaming environments; these platforms are entertainment and game based (Mao, 2014).

During COVID-19, there was a shift to creating relationships using SNSs as educators found themselves navigating online teaching. As educators made the shift to online learning in response to the government shutdown in the United States, they found themselves creating professional learning networks in digital spaces to combat the feelings of isolation as well as finding resources to help them achieve their student's academic goals (Pokherl & Chhetri, 2021; Riady et al., 2022). However, educators using SNSs to build relationships to support their needs as educators is not a new movement in education as this had been done for years prior to COVID-19 (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019).

SNSs such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X have provided a platform for educators to share resources, support each other emotionally and provided a community for those that might feel isolated given the area or content that they teach (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2019).

Facebook

Facebook is an online platform that connects people to each other using a social networking system. Users are able to search for people that they know, find events, groups, and pages, that interest them as well as make connections beyond their immediate relationships (Bissessar, 2014; Facebook, 2023). The SNSs Facebook was originally created for college students to be able to connect with one another (Bissessar, 2014) however, as the site gained popularity it became available to anyone who wished to use it. To access all the features of Facebook, a user must create a profile which can be public or private (Facebook, 2023). Users of the SNS can post updates, leave comments, like other users' posts, and follow Pages along with joining Facebook Groups (Lanterz-Anderson et al., 2017; Nelimarkka, 2021; Patahuddin, 2022). Facebook Pages are profiles that are created for business organizations and public figures. A user can follow a Facebook Page and they will see updates that are posted by the monitors of the page in their news feed (Facebook, 2023). Although Facebook Pages are popular among users, research has tended to examine Facebook Groups (Lantz-Anderson et al., 2017; Nelimarkka, 2021, Patahuddin, 2022). Facebook Groups are public or private organizations on Facebook that users navigate to explore their interests, share knowledge and resources, and make connections with members without having to be their friends and allowing access to their profile (Facebook, 2023; Lanterz-Anderson et al., 2017).

Facebook Groups used by teachers that have been studied by researchers are often done as case studies, examining a singular Facebook Group, as either a professional learning network, or as a platform for informal professional development (Bissessar, 2014; Lantz-Anderson et al., 2017; Nelimarkka, 2021; Patahuddin, 2022). Facebooks Groups have become a place where educators are able to share their thoughts and ask for help regarding curriculum, classroom

management, pedagogical practices, resources for instruction, and social issues impacting

education (Bissessar, 2014; Nelimarkka, 2021). Facebook, as a synchronous platform, allows

people to connect with others regardless of time of day or geographical locations which is an

appeal to educators as they often plan outside of contracted hours (Bissessar, 2014; Patahuddin,

2022). Meta is creating updates to improve the interface of Facebook Groups making it easier for

new members to navigate and promote better engagement for users (Facebook, 2023). Facebook

Groups and the features that are offered by the host, Facebook are updating the interface to make

the functions of the group helpful to new members and promote better engagement for users

(Facebook, 2023). While research reflects that using Facebook as a PD option yields positive

changes within the educator, there is still a need within the field of SNSs to examine who uses

the platform and why (Lanterz-Anderson et al., 2017; Nelimarkka, 2021; Patahuddin, 2022).

There is also a need to look beyond the professional development and professional learning

communities that are formed within those platforms, as research tends to examine the teacher's

perceptions of the human capital gained from the relationships and not how the information and

resources are used effectively within the classroom (Lanterz-Anderson et al., 2017).

Instagram

Instagram is a free social networking site that is owned by the parent company Meta,

which owns Facebook (Newton & Williams, 2022; Richter et al., 2022). Facebook and Instagram

are synced which allows the user to select content from Instagram to post on Facebook

(Instagram, 2023; Richter et al., 2022). Users of Instagram can download the application to their

device and create a profile (Newton & Williams, 2022). This SNS is more visual, as it allows

users to post images and videos with captions of no more than 2,200 characters (Richter et al.,

2022; Newton & Williams, 2022). Reels and stories, which are short videos or images that

disappear after a certain time, are unique features of the platform (Newton & Williams, 2022). While anyone can view public profiles and post on Instagram, users will need to create a profile to interact with all the features such as uploading posts, leaving comments on posts, and sending private messages to users (Newton & Williams, 2022). Instagram, being a visual driven site, makes it stand out when compared to sites like Facebook (Richter et al., 2022). Accounts that have a high number of followers, that establish some type of creditability in their content area, are known as influencers (Newton & Williams, 2022).

Although it is not a relatively new SNS, Instagram does not have in-depth studies done when compared to Facebook and Twitter (Richter et al., 2022). Regarding Instagram in the education fields, studies have been done to examine what educators use Instagram for (Richter et al., 2022). Educators seek out Instagram due to its visual format, as well as their ability to connect with diverse users to share examples of instruction, curriculum, organization, and materials (Newton & Williams, 2022; Richter et al., 2022).

X (Formally Known as Twitter)

X, formally known as Twitter, is a social networking site that allows users to interact with each other and build a digital network community with users from all around the world (Gao & Li, 2019; Richards et al., 2020). This SNS allows users to post status updates and information in the form of Tweets (Richards et al., 2022). Status updates on X are limited to 280 characters and can have images, links, or sounds attached (Richards et al., 2022; X Corp., 2023). Content that is posted on X can also be shared to Snapchat (X Corp, 2023). X also uses hashtags to make content searchable and help users connect with each other based on their common interests (Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017; Richards et al., 2020). Hashtags are also used to organize comments during livestreams, or live chats (Richards et al., 2020). To access all the features that

X offers, such as direct messaging and interacting with content, users must create a free account (Richards et al, 2020; X Corps, 2023).

X has become an informal professional development tool that provides communications for educators to gain support (Nelimarkka, 2021). X has made positive impacts within the teaching community by filling the need for real-time support (Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017; Richards et al., 2020). X allows for synchronous and asynchronous learning which is one of the reasons that educators use the platform as a form of professional development (Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017; Richards et al., 2020). The platforms also provide the opportunity for educators to create relationships to combat the feeling of isolation such as being the only educator in a school to teach a subject (Richards et al., 2020; Gao & Li, 2019). The current research regarding X as a form of on-demand professional development is limited (Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017).

TikTok

In August of 2014 a SNS known as Musical.ly was released and four years later the site was purchased by ByteDance. The Musical.ly application was merged with TikTok in 2018 (Anderson, 2020; Vizcaino-Verdu & Abidin, 2023). TikTok is a short, vertical video platform that presents one video at a time on a user's *for you page* (Anderson, 2020; Klug et al., 2021; Vizcaino-Vedu & Abidin, 2023). Originally, videos that were posted on the platform would last between three to five minutes, however, in 2022 the length of videos was increased to ten minutes. Videos can range from content centering around social activism to celebrity news (Vizcaion-Vedu & Abidin, 2023).

TikTok allows users to create a profile once they have downloaded the application. However, an individual that would only like to be a passive user of TikTok can still view videos

without creating a profile (Tiktok, 2023). To access the features of the platforms such as commenting, liking, or sharing videos as well as uploading content, a user does need to have a profile (Tiktok, 2023). While a majority of SNSs, such as Instagram and Facebook, are similar regarding the creation of a profile and the ability to comment and message users, TikTok's algorithm is what sets it apart. TikTok has what is called a "for you page" where videos are displayed for the user based upon the accounts they follow, the hashtags in videos they view, and what they share with other users on the platform (Hartung et al., 2020; Klug et al., 2021). While the algorithm is unique to the platforms it can be harmful as it can reinforce stereotypes. Even though users are able to report content they believe is harmful, it can take some time for TikTok to review the material and remove it from the platform (Anderson, 2020; TikTok, 2023). There are limited research studies when it comes to TikTok being used as an educational tool for those in the classroom as it is a relatively new platform and most studies are centered around Facebook, Instagram, and X (Bissessar, 2014; Hartung et al., 2022; Nelimarkka, 2021). Research that is currently available tends to focus on teacher's digital identities and how teachers are becoming micro-influencers on the platform (Vizcaino-Vedu & Abidin, 2023).

SNSs allow for educators to create relationships within a digital learning community that are developed based upon common interests and are supported by the users to creating meaningful resources and lessons that are based on personals experiences (Damico & Krutka, 2018; Zimmerman, 2021).

SNSs as Learning Communities

SNSs have impacted an individual's many roles and their experiences within society. Various SNSs platforms have also provided opportunities for those who are seeking professional relationships within an online community to do so, either one-on-one or within a group setting

(Zimmerman, 2021). Connections that are made within these groups or one-on-one are made by interacting and creating relationships with those that are like-minded with the same goals as the original users (Macia & Garcia, 2018; Prestridge, 2019). Users can share their experiences, resources or ask help in the form of public comments that are visible to users of the platform which allows other users to leave comments (Alberth, 2018; Facebook, 2023; Instagram, 2023; TikTok, 2023; X Corps, 2023). Users are also able to post content, such as link to a resource, and others who find that information helpful can access the information regardless of how long the information has been posted on the platform; in fact, users can get real-time information and help on SNSs (Alberth, 2018). Those who need more information can direct message the original content creator, depending on the platform, to ask for more support (Facebook, 2023; Instagram, 2023; Klug et al. 2021) If a user is unable to message the original content creator because of the platform's interaction interface, they can access the public profile of the content users to see if they are active on any other platform. Once the user has located the other SNSs the original content creator has profiles on, they can reach out on those platforms. For example, if an educator would like more information from a content creator on TikTok, but the content creator does not follow them, the user can see if there is an Instagram profile attached to the TikTok and message them on that platform (Klug et al., 2021). The ability to get real-time information and on-going support within a platform that is easily accessible with internet access provides educators an opportunity to collaborate beyond the initial information being shared and create professional relationships (Alberth, 2018; Prestridge, 2019).

Those who use SNSs as a digital professional learning community need to use mindfulness to ensure that they create and/or join a community with shared goals and have members that are a part of the community who are worth creating a relationship with (Damico &

Krutka, 2018; Goodyear et al., 2019). These learning communities are viewed as collaborative

professional learning and allow teachers the opportunity to grow their connections to support

their development as educators (Wang & Zang, 2023). For a SNSs to be a successful digital

learning community, it needs to be organized and provide a significant impact for those that

interact with the communities that are based on trust as well as provide an opportunity for the

community to develop and grow based on the goals and objectives of the members (Wei, 2014;

Zimmerman, 2021). From these online communities, educators can create professional learning

networks that support their growth and self-reflection as an educator. This also allows for

learning to be moved from teacher-centered, which is seen in traditional PD, to student-centered

(Wang & Zang, 2023). SNSs provide an insight into the real-life experiences of educators which

allows viewers to see what is working within classrooms and what is not (Hartung et al., 2020).

SNSs also allow the educator to build a relationship with communities that best support their

needs and will help them grow within their professional field (Gupta, 2014; Nelimarkka, 2021).

However, to successfully examine the benefits of these digital learning communities, there must

be an understanding as to not only why educators seek out support from an online community,

but also if the support they receive from these relationships are impacting students' achievement

in any way.

Gaps in the literature

While studies have been done examining how SNSs are used as a form of PD (Bissessar,

2014; Goodyear et al., 2019; Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017; Nelimarkka, 2021; Prestridge, 2019),

there is a gap in the research regarding if SNSs as PD are successful in raising students'

achievement in the classroom. One of the many purposes of PD is to improve students'

achievement within the classroom (Albert, 2018; Bates & Morgan, 2018; Bayer, 2014;

Desimone, 2011). However, studies focus on what is driving educators to SNSs, the relationships

they are creating, and what they are learning on these platforms (Bissessar, 2014; Goodyear et

al., 2019; Nelimarkka, 2021; Prestridge, 2019). To determine if SNSs are a viable form of PD for

in-person teaching, researchers need to examine the knowledge and resources found on SNSs

and how they are applied to the classroom setting.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Methods

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1) In what ways do middle and high school English teachers use SNSs for professional development?

2) What is the appeal of using SNSs as a professional development tool for middle and high school English teachers?

3) How do middle and high school English teachers implement what they have learned from SNS in their classroom effectively?

4) What is effective and ineffective about middle school and high school English teachers' uses of SNSs for professional development and implementation in the classroom?

For this study, I used an explanatory sequential mixed-method design approach (Mao, 2014; Nelimarkka et al., 2021) to answer the research questions above. This type of research included using mixed methods to find answers to questions that cannot be answered alone by statistical methods or qualitative methods. This study started with quantitative data collection that was analyzed before moving to the qualitative data collection and analyzation. I examined what is driving teachers to seek out PD on a digital platform. This study examined what the consequences or effects are from the knowledge, resources and information that is shared in the digital environment. Through interviews, the researcher was able to gain knowledge of what is occurring in the classroom setting and how that can impact student achievement.

The quantitative method of this approach was a multiple-choice/closed ended survey that collected data from the following areas: demographic, background, SNSs usage, amount of time spent on SNSs, purpose for using SNSs, participants' attitudes, and belief about SNSs, which has been used in this area in the past (Mao, 2014). The survey also collected information regarding teachers' experiences with professional development at their school and district level. Those who took part in the survey were asked to confirm their use of knowledge gained from SNSs and resources acquired from SNSs applications in the classroom. This information allowed a profile to be created of secondary English teachers who use SNSs. The research was used to see which platforms are the most popular with these teachers in general and then among specific age groups for professional use. This also revealed if there were similarities or differences between middle school and high school English teachers that use SNSs. In addition, the survey provided demographic background of potential interview participants that allowed the researcher to conduct purposeful sampling when selecting interview subjects (Goodyear et al., 2019). It is important to understand that, depending on the platform and topic, one race or gender may be more predominate than others (Goodyear et al., 2019). By using purposeful sampling, the researcher investigated the different demographics that use SNSs. One focus was the passive and active users of SNSs to determine if those who interact at various levels with SNSs are seeking the same information as well as if they are having the same experiences when applying their learning to the classroom.

The qualitative method of interview was conducted using Google Meet and participants were asked to share artifacts and experiences that are the result of resources or knowledge gained using SNSs. Participants were asked to bring a list of educational influencers they follow and what platform they use to follow them. After the interviews were conducted, the most recent

content created by the educational influence mentioned in the interviews were examined for any

reoccurring themes or connections. Video or picture description, hashtags, and the subject of the

content will be examined to determine common themes that answer the research questions.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative work it is important for researchers to acknowledge their own positionality

in the phenom that they are studying. As data is collected it is important to acknowledge my

own bias to SNSs as I am an avid SNSs user. Interpretivist perspective is the idea that we are not

able to understand someone unless we experience their realties and also acknowledges that

everyone's experiences are different (Damico and Krutka, 2018). Acknowledging these

experiences during the creation of my survey, selection of my interview participants, and

analyzing the data from the interviews, I ensured that I am presented a narrative that does not

reflect my personal experiences.

Methodology

This study used a multiple-choice survey and interviews to answer the research questions.

The multiple-choice survey consisted of twelve questions designed to take about twenty minutes

to complete in a single sitting. Questions one through five were created to collect demographic

background information. Questions six through nine were created to collect information

regarding participants social networking usage. Questions nine through eleven were created to

collect information about the participants' experiences with traditional professional

developments and questions twelve was to determine who potential participants in the interview

processes will be.

The survey will be conducted using Qualtrics and distributed using Microsoft Outlook, on social media platforms and presented at SCCTE conference during December 2023 and the first weekend of February 2024, with the option to extend submission until the second week of February if more participants are needed. Once the survey concluded, the participants were placed into a category based on their number of years teaching and the social media platforms they engage with for professional development. The intended sample number for the survey is thirty participants. Participants' responses were analyzed to determine common themes and usage within the categories and the requirements for a participant to be selected for the interview processes. Participants were contacted via email to schedule an interview that was hosted on Google Meet and would take place during the weekdays from 3:30pm until 5:30pm or on the weekends from 11:00am to 3:00pm. These times were selected to not interfere with teachers' contract hours. Interviews took place from the last week in February 2024 and concluded the second week of March 2024.

Participants

The participants were secondary English teachers who are members of the South Carolina Council of Teacher of English (SCCTE) and SNS users as the survey was shared on Facebook and Instagram. According to Martina McKoy, there are on average 200 teachers that are members of the SCCTE (Martina McKoy, personal communication, June 2, 2023). McKoy was the membership VIP for the 2022-2023 school year and is employed as the current high school English teacher curriculum coach for a coastal district in South Carolina. The organization is open to English teachers in South Carolina from all levels of education. This helped me to ensure that those who take my survey are active English teachers in South Carolina. Using SCCTE and SNSs as my data collection sources provided me with various age ranges, experiences in

teaching and level of interest; this allowed me help to create a more detailed profile and aided with purposeful sampling.

Throughout the survey multiple platforms were explored based on user interaction of teachers. The platforms that were focused on were Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and X. While there are other SNSs that are used by educators these four platforms have similar features such as commenting on a post, sharing post, and uploading content without having to pay for the basic access (Facebook, 2023; Instagram, 2023; X Corps, 2023; TikTok, 2023). These platforms are also accessible on mobile devices and not just on a computer with internet access (Facebook, 2023; Instagram, 2023; Twitter, 2023; TikTok, 2023).

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants in the interview section were selected based on their race, gender, years of teaching, PD experiences, SNSs usage, and application of knowledge and resources found on SNSs used in the classroom. Researchers should have at minimum one representative from each race and gender based upon the survey results (Damico & Krutka, 2018). Various age ranges and years of experience in teaching should be represented as well (Macia & Garcia, 2018). Participants were excluded as potential interview candidates if they did not use at least two SNSs for self-guided professional development and if they had not attempted to implement what they learned from SNSs in their classrooms. The researchers will have two alternates selected in case a participant is not able to take part in the interview process.

Participants' survey data was collected from Qualtrics and placed into an Excel spreadsheet. Participants had their first and last initial placed in a row of the spreadsheets. Each column will be labeled to reflect the questions found within the survey. For example, column one

will be labeled question one. Participants that use more than one SNS, have attempted to use information they have gathered from the platforms in their classroom, have attended at least three professional developments and are willing to take part in the interview process will be highlighted in green to create a pool of participants to select from for the interview process. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that various demographics such as age, race, gender, and various types of SNSs are presented to avoid skewing the results from the interview portion of the study. Data from participants not used for the interview process was analyzed and included in the discussion. The survey data was analyzed to determine common themes regarding SNSs usage, purpose of using SNSs, and opinions of traditional PD. Based upon the results of the survey data, additional interview questions were added for clarification purposes.

Interview questions were generated to focus on answering the research questions about the appeal of SNSs as PD, the content that is being interacted with, as well as how the implementation of the information, knowledge, skills, or resources impact students' achievements. An email invite was sent out to participants who inducted they wanted to take part in the interview survey. Emails were sent out twice a week, six participants on Monday and the remaining participants on Friday to avoid scheduling issues. Interviews were held during the week from 3:30pm until 5:30pm to avoid interruptions during contract hours. Interviews were also held during the weekend at a time that was convent to the participant. Participants were interviewed independently to respect the privacy of the participant.

Once the interviews were scheduled, participants were sent an invite to join a Google Meet session. Google Meet is the preferred digital meeting platform as researchers can record the session as well as have a transcript of the conversation generated. The Google Meet recording was uploaded to Otter.ai and a secondary transcript was created. Otter.ai allows users to

highlight transcripts and store information in one location to provide easy access to information. The platform also generates keyworks based upon the session. Transcripts were coded using a color system based on themes generated. Colors were assigned to the different reoccurring themes that appear in the interview process as well as in the survey analysis. Themes emerge depending on the data collected during the survey and interview process. Once all themes were analyzed, they were used to answer the research questions.

Participants were asked to bring an artifact that is the result of using resources, knowledge, or skills in the classroom that have been gained by SNSs usage. If participants do not have an artifact, they were asked to discuss an experience or lesson they used. Those who choose to participate in the interview were asked to generate a list of SNSs influencers that they follow; participants were asked about this in the interview process. An interview protocol has been generated to answer the research questions regarding the appeal of SNSs as PD, the content that is being interacted, as well as how the implementation of the information, knowledge, skills, or resources impacts students' achievements.

After the interview process was completed, transcript again, were color coded and reoccurring themes, and what SNSs platforms are being used the most as well as the purpose of seeking out SNSs for support in a second round of analysis. Once this process was completed, an examination of the most recent content posted by a sample population of the influencers discussed in the interview took place. This is a way to triangulate the data given in the interview to ensure what the participants are reporting. The researcher will need to examine the descriptors attached to the post and any hashtags or keywords used to describe the video's content. These hashtags or keywords were compared with the themes emerging from the study.

A second Excel file was created to organize the influencers, the SNSs they are on, the topic of their content, teaching specialty and if they are currently teaching. This information was compared to see if there are any reoccurring themes regarding the information, resources, or knowledge that is being shared. This data was compared to the survey data and interview to determine if the content being presented to educators is what they were seeking out. Once the data from the survey, interview and SNSs influencers was completed, the researcher then examined the findings to determine if SNSs are a viable form of PD that is making a positive impact on students' achievements.

Survey Questions and Interview Questions

The following are the survey questions and interview questions. Interview questions can be adjusted based upon the results of the survey.

Survey Questions:

1) First and Last Name

2) Please select the following regarding your racial identity:

    a. Asian

    b. American Indian/Alaska Native

    c. African American

    d. Caucasian

    e. Hispanic

    f. Pacific Islander

    g. Bi-racial

3) Please select one of the following regarding the gender you identify as: (based upon Patahuddin, 2022)

    a. Male

    b. Female

    c. Non-Binary

    d. Prefer not to respond

4) Please select one of the following regarding your age:

    a. 20-24

    b. 25-30

    c. 31-34

    d. 35-40

    e. 41-44

    f. 45-50

    g. 51-54

    h. 55-60

    i. 61 or older

5) Please select one of the following regarding the number of years you have teaching middle and/or high school English:

    a. 1-3

    b. 4-7

    c. 8-11

    d. 12-15

    e. 18-21

    f. 22-25

    g. 28-31

    h. 32 or more

6) Please select the social networking sites (social media) that you actively access for professional use (to improve your teaching). Select all that apply.

    a. Facebook

    b. X (Formally Twitter)

    c. Instagram

    d. TikTok

    e. Other

7) What time of day do you typically access social networking sites (social media) for professional use. Please select all that apply

    a. Morning (6:00am-11:59am)

    b. Afternoon (12:00pm-4:59pm)

    c. Evening (5:00-9:59pm)

    d. Late Night (10:00pm-11:59pm)

8) What is the main type of content you seek out/follow on social networking sites (social media) (Inspired by Lantz-Anderson et al., 2017; Nelimarkka, 2021; Patahuddin, 2022)

    a. Teaching techniques

    b. Curriculum

    c. Social and activism in education

    d. Emotional support

    e. Examples of lesson plan/instruction

      f.   New technology approaches

9) Have you used any resources, information or knowledge that you have gathered from the any of the following sites in your in-person classroom setting: TikTok, Facebook, X (Formally known as Twitter), Instagram

      a. Yes

      b. No

10) Have you attended at least three professional developments that have been hosted by any of the following: school, district or conference

      a. Yes

      b. No

11) Do you feel that the professional developments you have attended, in general, have been helpful or impactful to your teaching and your classroom?

      a. Yes

      b. No

12) Are you willing to take part in an interview that will be hosted using Google Meets?

      a. Yes

      b. No

10 participants, five from the middle school English classroom and five from the high school English classroom, will be selected to continue to the interview phase. Participants will represent active users of SNSs that apply the knowledge, resources and skills within their English classroom to support students' growth and academic goals.

Interview questions:

1) Can you please state your name, age and years of teaching experience?

2) How often do you use social media?

3) Which platforms do you access the most and what do you like about those platforms?

4) What type of educational or teaching content do you engage with? This can be viewing, sharing, saving or taking notes information.

5) Who are some educators on social media that you follow?

6) What made you want to follow these influencers/pages?

7) How do you determine which influences/pages to follow?

8) Have you used lessons, curriculum, teaching strategies in your classroom? Can you tell me a little about that activity?

9) Do you feel that the information you gather from social media was used successfully in your classroom?

10) Do you provide any resources, support, curriculum or knowledge on social media platforms? If so, can you tell me why? If not, can you tell me why?

11) How do you feel about professional developments that are offered in your district, schools or conferences that you have attended?

12) What do you wish professional developments would address?

13) Do you feel that social media is more helpful than in person professional development?

Once this data was collected from participants it was analyzed for common themes. These themes were used to answer research questions for the study. Additional information that is outside the scope of the study as defined by the questions was excluded from the results.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The survey's goal was to ask about the different platforms and reasons participants accessed SNSs and their feelings about whether traditional PD effectively meet educators' needs. Before attending South Carolina Council of Teachers of English (SCCTE) in February 2024, the survey was distributed on two SNSs, Facebook and Instagram, during December 2023 and January 2024. The survey was presented at SCCTE during a poster session on February 3rd, 2024, and the survey remained active until the second week of February 2024. There were thirty participants that completed the survey. The interviews conducted after the survey ended provided insights to SNSs used and content sought out on those platforms. The survey data and interview data produced the following results.

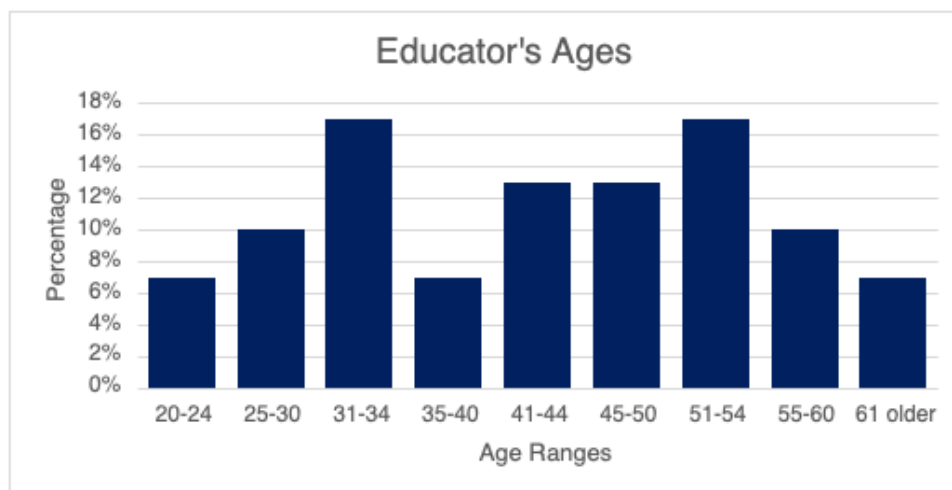**Table 1.1**: Age Ranges of Participants in the Survey

Table 1.1 provides an overview of the age range the survey participants belong to with the age range of 31-34 and 51-54 being the largest groups represented. This wide range of ages was also reflected within the interview candidates. All but three age ranges were represented within the interview participants: 35-40, 45-50 and 61 or older.
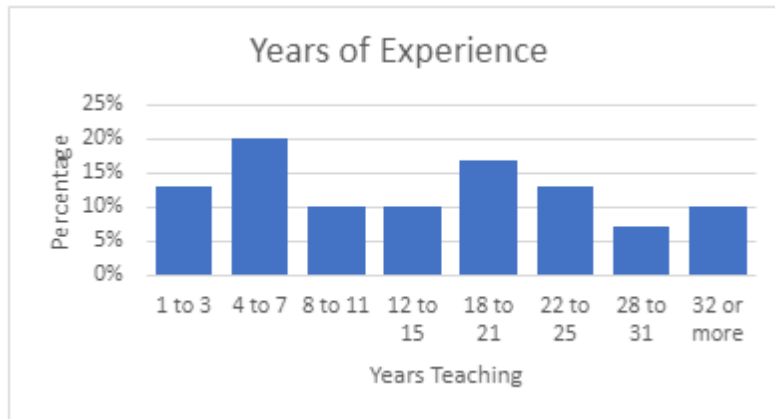
Table 1.2: Years of Teaching Experience in the Survey

Table 1.2 gives an overview of the number of years educators have been teaching. 4-7 years of teaching experience was the largest group represented within the survey, with 20% of participants falling in that range.
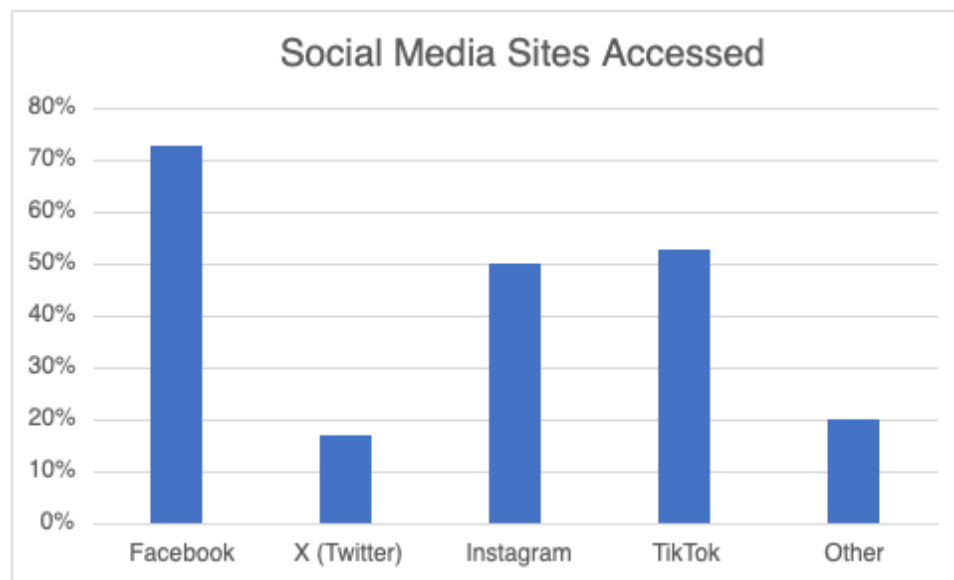
Table 1.3: SNSs Used by Participant in the Survey

Table 1.3 provides a breakdown of the SNSs that educators use to access self-guided PD. Participants were able to select all platforms they accessed to gather information that would

support them in their careers. During the interview process participants were offered the chance to discuss the platforms they access the most and what they like about those SNSs. According to the data collected in the survey 73% of participants used Facebook as a form of PD. The second most popular SNSs educators accessed was TikTok with 53% of participants accessing the platform. Instagram was accessed by 50% of survey participants while only 17% of participants access X (formally known as Twitter).

During the interview, participants provided insight as to why X was the least used platform presented in the survey. Cara stated "...I don't necessarily use Twitter as much for PD. I did a great deal in the beginning but it's not the same platform now...".

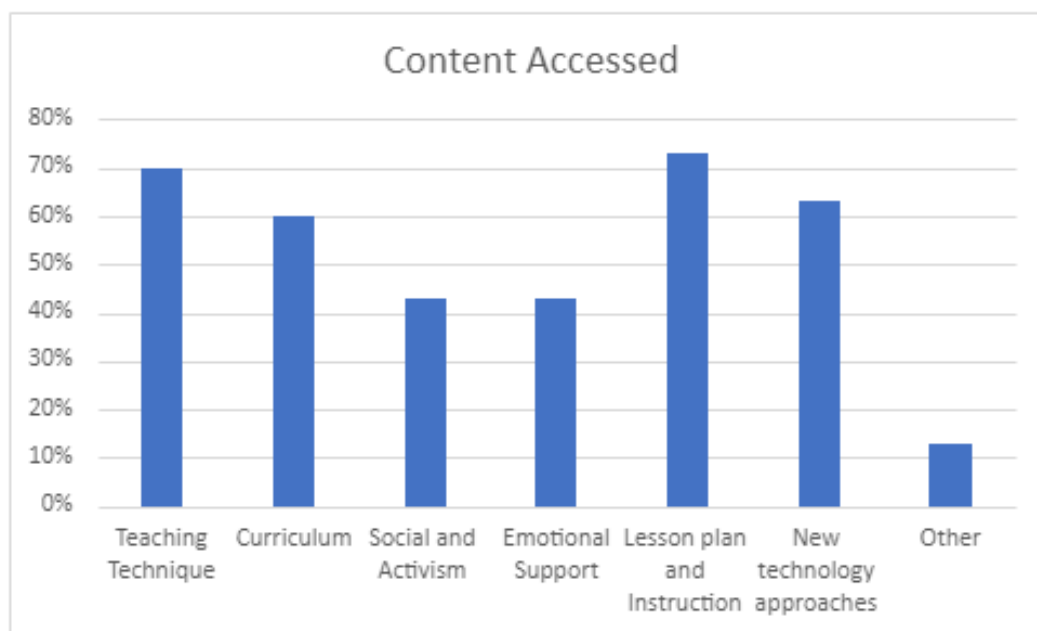**Table 1.4:** Content Participants Sought Out on SNSs

Table 1.4 provides an overview of what content educators are seeking out on SNSs. Based upon survey data, lesson plans and instructions are the content that is sought out the most by educators, with 73% of participants accessing various SNSs to interact with those types of

resources. The second highest is teaching technique which could be classroom management or pedagogical approaches. 60% of participants access SNSs to find content that addresses teaching techniques. Lesson plans, instructions and teaching techniques are reflected in the interviews as all 12 participants stated that they used a lesson plan or technique they found on SNSs in their classrooms, and it was effective.

Of the 30 participants who took part in the survey, 22 were contacted to take part in the interview portion. Out of those 22, 12 were able to schedule and complete their interview.

Overview of interview data

Interview participants were selected from those who took part in the survey that used at least two forms of SNSs, attended at least three PDs and tried to use what they learned from SNSs in their classroom. Out of the twelve interview participants only one was male and two were African American. One participant, Abigial, is teaching at the middle school level; however, Marjorie and Lily both taught at the middle school level in previous years. Marjorie retired from teaching last year, but she is still active in the school system as a substitute teacher for the same district she retired from. She will often take long term substitute positions that are in the English classroom. Lily, who is currently a high school English teacher, also taught at the college level as well. Travis, who taught last year as a high school English teacher, is currently teaching at the college level.

Most participants who took part in the interview process have only been teaching for between one to three years, which is different from the survey data as most teachers who took the survey have been teaching for four to seven years. It is important to note that one of the interviews participants that had been teaching for two years was an alternative certification track teacher (Hailee), one participant had only been teaching for six months (Blake, with their

internship they were able to select a full year for the purpose of this study) and finally one participant had three years of teaching experiences but left the classroom for a year before returning to teaching (Sabrina). Regardless of years of experience educators shared similar ideas regarding PD and accessing SNSs. For example, Blake, a first-year secondary English teacher stated regarding professional development: "I do wish they were geared more towards what I'm specifically looking for as a first-year teacher, which is classroom management" (Blake's interview). Blake explained that they felt college did not prepare them for classroom management. Sabrina, who left education for a year and returned stated the following regarding professional development: "I used to not like them to be honest, but I took some time off of teaching and now I actually got to see, like, how beneficial they really are when you actually put an interest into them". However, Sabrina still uses SNSs as a form of PD and reflects the idea that you must be interested in the topic presented in traditional PD for them to be impactful. These two interview participants, while in the same classification of years of experience, are in different classification of ages. Both participants demonstrate that the content of PD is important. A similar idea is reflected in another participant who has been in education for over 20 years and is 51 years old. Cara stated: "I find that if it comes from the top down [professional developments provided by the district or school] there is a disconnect in the understanding of what teachers need." These statements from the three participants reflect why there was the move from in-person PD provided by schools and districts to self-guided PD via SNSs as they can select the content to interact with that, they find valuable. In-person PDs, that the participants must attend, such as those from the districts or school, are often not seen as useful with the current climate of the classroom and what teachers need to be successful. This lack of relevant and meaningful content caused participants to seek out PD on their own.

Each participant mentioned at least once how they used what they gathered from SNSs within their classroom. While interview participants used several SNSs, the one that was used the most was Facebook with TikTok as the second most used platform. Regardless of the SNSs used educators accessed platforms for self-guided PD to find support such as information on resources, materials and emotional support to assist them with their classroom and teaching practices. The following are three examples from the interviews where participants discussed what they took from SNSs in their classrooms. Marjorie and Martha stated that they used pop culture references they found on SNSs for their classroom. Marjorie used a Lady Gaga song for an introduction to *The Crucible* while Martha used "No Body, No Crime" by Taylor Swift to help students with writing using evidence. Another teacher, Blake, found a lesson on SNSs that had students take care of a monster they made from an uncooked potato, which they had to destroy later in the unit to help students understand the novel *Frankenstein's* main theme. The interview process gave a more in-depth look at why SNSs have become a form of professional development for educators regardless of age or teaching experience and through the stories of those interviewed, four themes emerged.

Overview of themes

Participants were selected for the interview process if they used at least two forms of SNSs; for this interview, educators could interact with SNSs not listed in the survey. 20% selected other as an option form the survey regarding SNSs accessed for PD and through the interviews it was discovered that YouTube was considered a SNSs by participants and was actively used. Those who received an email to take part in the interview portion of the research study also needed to have been teaching for one full year (internship experience was allowed) and attended at least three PD. Interview participants also needed to have used what they learned

from SNSs in their classroom or personal life as it relates to education. During the interview

process four themes emerged: adaptability, relatability, support, and collaboration. For an

educator to use SNSs as a form of professional development one or more of the themes must be

present within the content or the content creator.

Definition of theme:

> *Collaboration*: Collaboration was the most universal of all the themes that developed
>
> from the study. Whether it was content dealing with a situation or resource, participants
>
> revealed in their responses that educators can work together on a general issue regardless
>
> of the level of their relationships, grade level taught, or similar school site. Collaboration
>
> does not require there to be trust, validation, or a relationship for the transaction of
>
> information to take place.
>
> *Adaptability*: Educators can take the information they find on SNSs, regardless of the
>
> subject area or grade level taught, and modify it to suit their classroom needs. A
>
> relationship is not needed for adaptability to occur between the participants and the
>
> content creators. However, they must see the relationship with the material to themselves
>
> and then possess the ability to take that information and change it so that it fits in their
>
> classroom, which might vary from the content creator's.
>
> *Community:* Community is a theme that developed during the interview process that had
>
> two subcategories form: support and relatability. Community is defined as individuals
>
> who connect based on sharing similarities such as employment, struggles, goals, interests
>
> or SNSs. Community is based on these connections being built as it relates to social
>
> capital theory. These connections can be superficial with individuals taking a passive
>
> stance within the community and simply taking in information or taking an active stance

where individuals share information in the digital or in-person space. It is important to understand that communities created on SNSs are going to vary depending on the algorithm and purpose of the platform being used.

For a member to join a community, they must feel like they can relate to potential members of the community or be supported by potential members as they can feel value. Members that create a community based on relatability can have a deeper connection with the content creator as they see themselves as a comrade in arms; they are dealing with the same struggles or same a similar background. For example, an English teacher that struggles to have students read Shakespeare can see themselves in an English teacher that is struggling to get their students to read a novel. Both teachers can relate to each other because they both are teaching English and are struggling with students reading. Support is different as a strong connection to the content creator is not needed to take value from the content being presented. When a member feels supported within a community it is because they can understand and adapt what is being presented to themselves. For example, a principal may post about dealing with a difficult parent regarding discipline while an English teacher may watch the same video and feel seen as they had just dealt with a difficult parent that emails throughout the day regarding a student's grade. The English teacher is not able to relate to the principal, see themselves reflected within creator, because they do not understand the various struggles that a principal goes through, however they are able to connect to the content as they have a frame of reference to understand the emotional situation at hand. It is important to note that depending on one's positionality the terms support and relatability could be interchangeable.

- o *Relatability*: Educators need to see themselves reflected within the content creator or the situation being presented to find validation within what is being presented.

Those who find content relatable feel as if they are comrades in arms as they are not only able to find a connection to what they are seeing but also see it reflected within themselves. This may mean a similar situation being presented, such as a similar educational setting, or similar student concerns. Educators who related to what they see on SNSs are likely to take the information and may apply it to their own teaching practices as they value what is being presented or they may just feel validated that someone else is having a similar teaching struggle or teaching environment. When the participants could relate to a content creator, they were more likely to become a source for PD. The relationship here was between the participants and the content creators.

o *Support:* While support can be like relatability in the fact that the participant could see that the content creator understood the dilemma that brought them to the site for professional development, the difference was that the participant did not need to be able to feel a deeper connection to the to the content creator nor the information being presented. Support can be found regardless of whether the content creator is an elementary schoolteacher or a principal because the participant could make sense of what was being presented and apply it to their current need. Value did not need to be placed on the content creator nor what was being presented for the participant to connect to the information. The relationship here is between the participants and information being provided by the content creators.

The themes were original in nature and did not rely on existing research in their use or categorization. Although quotes from interview participants can be categized in various themes

the researcher analyzed the data through the lens of a secondary English classroom and how

participants used SNSs to support their learning as English teachers. All categories were filter

through the lenses of a high school English teacher as my positionality in the role of doctoral

student and fulltime English teacher as the researcher provided a unique perspective of viewing

responses from fellow English teacher regarding their use of SNSs and the way that they were

attributed to themes that emerged in the study.

Adaptability

Adaptability as a theme in this study centers around users of SNSs taking materials,

resources, information, or other content found on SNSs and modifying it to suit the needs of their

classroom or teaching practices. This modification can be based on the class's demographics,

resource availability such as internet access, or adapting the content to help further an idea. SNSs

can be an effective tool for educators when the information they are seeking out is beneficial to

their needs and what they learn from SNSs adapted to a classroom environment. These decisions

are discrete in nature based on each classroom experience. For example, one teacher may look at

a suggestion of how to work with English Language Learners with only one student in their

classroom begin labeled as such, while another teacher may consider the same staff development

for their class where half of the students may be English Language Learners. Thus, the same PD

is offered but the teacher decides how to adapt that information to their own classroom.

Fifty-Eight percent of those who took part in the interview portion of the survey discussed

how they use SNSs to find inspiration for lesson plans and materials to use within their practices,

which is a form of adaptability. Hailee stated that "Social media was more helpful (than

traditional PD) because I could tailor what I was looking for…PD you get what is given to you".

Due to SNSs being tailored to the user's experiences based upon features such as *for you page* or

the suggestions provided by Meta based on the algorithm of the platform (TikTok, 2023; Facebook 2023) it can make it easier for a user to find materials and tailor them to their needs. SNSs can provide users with content that is linked to their needs which allows the users to adapt the information to their situation. Another mention of adaptation came from the interview with Martha who stated: "Occasionally, I'll go to Teachers Pay Teachers and look and see if there is something I'm struggling [with like] coming up with something or a rubric. I will go there, I don't necessarily get things [like purchasing or downloading], but I get ideas." This demonstrates the teacher's ability to examine a resource and create ideas, which is a form of adapting, to suit their needs. While Teachers Pay Teachers does not meet the requirements for the study as a SNS, many individuals will find lesson plans on SNSs which will often be linked to blogs or other websites like Teachers Pay Teachers as demonstrated in statement made by Sophie during her interview. Sophie said: "And that's like the lesson plan types is actual activities that are created that are usually on some type of website from the person who's creating it [the content creator], and then you can go and adapt that to your class." Sophie found information on SNSs that content creators linked back to their website or blog post.

Abigail stated that they found new strategies for independent reading on TikTok. She stated the following regarding a video in which a content creator shared a classroom strategy for reading accountability: "So instead of us just doing a one pager, they just come in, talk to her [the teacher] about the book and have to prove that they read it." Abigial adapts this to her classroom; "I've had some discussion with the kids. I can tell you haven't read this book…anything about it and so I adopted it as my own, so I use that." Originally Abigial would use one pagers, a one-page book report that uses images, to determine if students are reading however, she took the book discussion strategy from an online content creator and adapt the conversation part of the

strategy to fit her classroom. Not only do teachers need to adapt what they have learned from SNSs to fit the needs of their students, but they also must adapt when materials, such as internet connection, are not working.

Sophie stated during her interview the following, "The only problem that I ran into was internet [access] when they [the content creator] tried to provide QR codes for some of the personality quizzes, and it [school's firewalls] would block [them], so some of them could not do that. But I could find a different way to give them access to that". While there was no adaptation made to the material there was an adaptation regarding how the material was accessed by the students. For information collected from SNSs to be effective, educators must be able to adapt the information or materials provided to best suit their needs.

Support

Support for educators in this study can be defined either as material support such as lesson plans, content videos explaining concepts to students, or educators and emotional support such has humor, or connections made with other users of SNSs that help to combat isolation. Twenty-five percent of interview participants made the decision to follow content creators because they could understand what was being presented and by relating to others, they are were able to find support as they see themselves reflected within the content that is being presented and understand that they are dealing with similar issues that others are. In this theme, support is similar to reliability; however, to move from relatability to the higher level of support there must be a thought process or a moment when a user's thinks *I must be able to go further than understanding your position or you understand mine to. Since I can relate to you and we teacher similar students or content I can use the materials you are offering*. Participants felt less isolated when it came to their classroom issues and struggles as educators because they could see

themselves reflected in the content being taught and that content creator that they relate to had

materials and experiences they find believable and usable in their own teaching situation. Users

can move from support to relatability if they can see themselves reflected beyond one instance of

interaction with the content or the content creator. Martha stated "…I get to connect with people,

or at least hear what else is going on from others in my profession. And with TikTok it is nice to

see some new ideas. It's also nice to see that others are having the same issues and concerns, and

that we are not isolated, that it's a broader issue than just one school or state." Martha did not

mention feeling a deeper connection to those she passively interacted with on SNSs nor discussed

the building of relationships like Cara did. Martha felt seen and supported by the content and the

content creators she interacted with. Cara discussed in detail during her interview how she

created relationships with individuals she felt support from during COVID-19, which allowed her

to move from a support relationship to a relatable relationship. Cara will be discussed in the next

theme, relatability. Emotional support is another support that teachers seek out when using

SNSs. Educators can see that they are not the only ones who are struggling within their classroom

which allows them to feel that that they are not alone within a particular situation which gives

them the opportunity to take what they learn from SNSs and apply it to their practices. Another

element of emotional support can come in the form of humor.

Educators also find humor on SNSs that supports their emotional needs as well. When

Marjorie was asked what else she seeks out from SNSs other than lesson plans or materials, she

stated emotional support in the form of humor. Marjorie stated "Yeah humor. That's emotional

support." While combating isolation and being able to find connections with others is emotional

support, it is important to keep in mind that emotional support can come in all forms including

humor. Marjorie mentioned the content creators Gerry Brooks as a form of humor support

however, it is important to note that when content creator can gain popularity because teachers feel like they can connect what is being presented to their life, regardless of the presenter of the information grade level, experience or position within the school it can also be viewed in a negative light thus leading the content creator to acknowledge they made a mistake. An example of this comes from content creator Gerry Brook, who was a content creator mentioned in the interview process. Gerry Brook mainly posts videos that center on humor however; he posted a video that was received by his viewers in a negative light. On February 4th, 2024, Brook uploaded a video that had no hashtag with the caption "from the heart. Grab yourself a mirror!" (Brooks, 2024). In this video he apologizes for a video he posted in frustration in which he was negative towards students; the original video was removed and could not be viewed for analyzation purposes. The summary of the apology video is asking educators to look at themselves when they have a difficult student and to decide how they can best support this student. As the video progresses, Brooks apologies for the video he posted and attempts to redirect the situation to what he should have said and done with that student who was disruptive. This moment of vulnerability not only shows teachers that they are not isolated when it comes to classroom situations, but supports them in understanding that educators make mistakes regardless of their position within the school and thus need to learn from those mistakes. SNSs not only provide humor as an emotional support and help to combat the feeling of isolation, but also allow educators to connect with each other to celebrate their success and reflect on their failures.

However, educators must be able to relate to the support they are finding on SNSs for it to have a lasting impact on their classroom practices.

Relatability

For the study's purpose, relatable addresses the ability for educators to see value with the content or the content creator they interact with because they can make deeper connections based on similarities they have with the content or the creator. This can be participants who connect with the content because they wish to be like the teacher they see on SNSs, or they see themselves reflected in the content that is being presented. Educators can relate to those they see on SNSs due to their struggles with students, curriculum or emotional situations being reflected within the content, which makes the content more valuable to the users. For content to be relatable, educators must be able to see themselves within the relationships being formed between the users and the content creator. Viewers can feel that the information provided is more helpful because it is directly related to the content they are teaching, the grade level or a very similar experience. During the interview, educators said that regardless of how the information is presented, SNSs or traditional PD, the information must be relatable for the educators to find value. During the interview process, Sophie stated that they feel that the information presented on SNSs is more helpful to her because it is more relatable to the needs of teachers and she follows creators that she relates to as a high school English teacher, making the content based on her needs. Those who use SNSs for PD can relate to what is being presented because they are the intended audience of educational content. Sophie stated, "But typically, I follow mostly like English creators". Sabrina reflected the same idea when asked what content creators she follows. During the interview process Sabrina stated "I'm a high school teacher. I plan to always be in the high school setting. So, the people that I follow are either going to be upper middle level, or all high school teachers". Both participants decided to follow and find value in content creators that are in very similar situations such as being high school English teachers.

As educators find information and resources they like, they can follow the creators and collaborate with SNSs members creating a digital learning community. Cara created a digital professional learning community during COVID-19 with other English teachers that were experiencing the same struggles that she was which was the sudden move to online learning.

During her interview Cara stated the following:

> "So, I choose what I share. I believe it is my intellectual property. So, I'm careful about what I share and how I share it, but I love to collaborate. So, the group and the AP Lit group [has] my friends from West Virginia [and] my friend in California. We all got together. There's about 18 of us and when Covid hit, we knew we were all going into lockdown [we started to collaborate]".

Those 18 individuals all came together because they could relate to the struggles of being English teachers during the pandemic who were suddenly moved to online learning and those relationships that were built because a digital professional learning community which Cara still interacts with during the time of the interview. The group does share information with others outside of their immediate PLC and provides opportunities for collaboration.

Collaboration

Collaboration was the main theme that emerged throughout the interview. For this study, collaboration is when a user consumes information and comments on the content, shares their own content, or shares what they have found online with their in-person professional learning community. SNSs provides a chance for users to create a digital professional learning community built on sharing and discussing resources. Cara stated that during COVID-19 they worked with

other educators to create resources: "So there was a great deal of collaboration and then we gave these resources to teachers, much to do about site through the Teach Living Poets". As previously mentioned, Cara built relationships with 18 other educators on SNSs and the results of those collaborative relationships resulted in a Facebook group being created to support other teachers. This demonstrates that collaboration can lead to the support of other educators even if they were not the intended audience when the content was being created.

Martha, like all interview participants, was asked what they wished in-person PD would address. She said "I hadn't thought about it. But I think professional development if it was purely collaborative [so teachers could discuss] what do you [do]? How did you teach this? What do you like? I think that would be awesome. As they are now [traditional PD], I don't think they're effective. So, I probably do get more from social media."

The final question of the interview process asked which method of PD the participants find more useful, traditional PD or self-guided PD using SNS. Although Travis felt traditional PD were more useful, he discussed the collaborative element of SNSs he enjoyed. He stated: "So, I think there's something there. I also like the fact like even though I stated earlier that social media allows us to be able to communicate in a fashion that just not just locally, but kind of spans across the globe. I think there is something about being able to meet in a [digital] space and share, you know, with that community in that culture". The community that is built with in SNSs allow users to collaborate with individual regardless of their location or time of day, which can allow teachers to make digital professional learning communities or take what they have learned from the online communities and share within with their in person professional learning community when they need it. This was reflected in Emma's interview. Emma stated that they take what they find from SNSs and "shared a few things with colleagues" (Emma, Interview).

Regardless of if educators seek PD in a digital or in-person format, the ability to collaborate with others in the profession is important for educators.

Table 1.5 Sample of SNSs Influences from Interview Participants

Table 1.5 gives an overview of some content creators that were mentioned during the interview process. The goal was to have one content creator from each platform that was discussed during the interview however, there was no mention of content creators who the participants directly interacted with on Instagram or X. Content creators that were mentioned were assigned a number at random and a number generator was used to select seven content creators.

During the time of analyzation, the three most recent posts were examined to see if the themes that developed during the study from the interviews were also present on SNSs. The content creators users' names are listed as well as the platform they were associated with based on the interview participants comments, the platforms that users are able to find them on, an overview of the post's title, and any hashtags associated with it, as well as one to two word description of the content and the theme that is present in the content as it relates to the study.

Table 1.5

Content Creator	Platform	Overview of post	Themes Present
@cook_in_the_class room (TikTok)	TikTok; Instagram	• Social and Emotional/Humor: *Anyone else called Mom or Dad lately?* (#teachertok #teachersoftiktok #theycallmemother) 2/22/24 • Student Connection: *What Gen Z terms have you learned lately?* (#genzslang #teachersoftiktok #teachertok #students #mewing) 2/22/24 • Social issue: *Sign the petition via the link in my bio to join us. (*#ReadAcrossAmerican #TeacherTok #TeachersofTikTok #NEAToday) 2/21/24	• Support • Relatable • Collabora tion
Crash Course (YouTube)	YouTube; X; Patreon; Tumbler: Facebook; Instagram	• Education/Resource: *Why Your Cat Looks Like That: Genetics Crash Course Biology #31* (Sources are provided in the description) 2/21/24 • *Black American History Arts & Culture Compilation* 2/16/24 • Education/Resource: *Why Are All Humans Unique? Meiosis: Crash Course Biology*	• Support • Support • Support

		(Sources are provided in the description) 2/14/24	
Eductopia (YouTube)	YouTube; Facebook; X; Instagram	• Education/Resource: *60-Second Strategy: Role Reading* 2/22/24 • Education/Resource: *3 Ways to Support Academic Talk Among Students* 2/17/24 • Education/Resource: *A New Theory on the Teen Mental Health Crisis* 2/10/24	• Support • Support • Support
State Advocacy (Facebook)	Facebook	• Post on 2/22/24 regarding contracts • Post on 2/22/24 regarding Flex Time Manager • Post on Page: Another Advocacy Group regarding legislative alert network	• Relatable • Support • Collaboration (group members post asking for advice and help from other members)
@gerryboooksprin (TikTok)	TikTok; Instagram	• Humor/Relate: *Just Floored...*(#teacher #parents #parenting #cookie #celebrate #celebration #happy #unhappy #verb 2/16/24 • Humor/Relate: *Happen all fth time!* #teacher #educaiton #love #sweetheart #valentine #note #juice #hostess #gift #giftideas #date 2/13/24 • Teacher Reflection/Social emotional/relate: no	• Support • Relatable • Support or Relatable (This depends on the viewer and the connect they make with the issue being

		hashtags listed; caption: From the heart. Grab yourself a mirror. 2/4/24 (addressing a video that he posted early in which he was negative about students)	discussed)
@therealeddiebcome dy (TikTok)	Tiktok, Instagram, YouTube	• Relatable/Humor: *Eddie B on Not wanting to teach & single teachers dating!* #therealeddiebcomedy, #teacher, #teachers, #teacherlife, #educator, #teachersonlycomedeyt our2024, #educatorsoftiktok, #tiktokteachers, #theteachersvoice #theteacherschamp, #teacherschamp, #teachersvoice, #whatwouldeddiebsay, #teacherstrick, #teachersselfdefense, #cpittraining, #publicschools 3/3/24 • Humor/Relatable: *Adults get on school bus (school bus emoji) and confronts a student!* #threaleddiebcomedy, #teacher, #teachers, #teacherslife, #educator, #teachersonlycomedyto ur2024, #educatorsofticktok, #tiktokteacher, #theteachersvoice, #theteacherschamp, #teachersvoice, #whatwouldeddiebsay, #teacherstrick,	• Support • Relatable • Relatable

		#teacherselfdefnse, #cpittraining, #publicschool (Video is the content creator commenting on a Fox New 8 story) 2/29/24 • Humor/Relatable: *Teacher saves student from choking on a water bottle cap!* #therealeddibebcomedy, #teacher, #teachers, #teacherlife, #educator, #teachersonlycomedytour2024, #educatorsoftiktok, #tiktokteachers, #theteachersvoice, #theteacherschamp, #teacherschamp, #teachersvoice, #whatwouldedddiebsay, #teachersstrick, #teacherselfdefnse, #cpitraining, #publicschool (Video is the content creator commenting on an Inside Edition story) 2/26/24	
@burntoutteachers (TikTok)	TikTok; Instagram	• Humor/Relatable: *Part 1: Why I'll never go pack pt. 181* (if you're new to my WINGB series, these are *true* stories shared with me form *other* teachers...with a little added flair of course* 😵 *) I'm always accepting crazy stories from teachers, so if you have one, don't be shy!*	• Relatable • N/A • Relatable

| | | *#teacher,* *#burntoutteachers,* *#teachers,* *#teachersoftiktok,* *#teachersontiktok* *#teacherlife,* *#teachersbelike,* *#teachersprob,* *#teacherprobs,* *#tiredteacher,* *#teachertired,* *#teacherfunny,* *#teachertok,* *#whyillnevergo back, # wingb 3/9/2024*

• Blooper reel
#blooper 3/9/2024

    • Relatable: *What should the rule be when a parent comes to observe their child?*
#burntoutteachers, #teacher, #teachers, #teachersoftiktok, #teachersontiktiok, #teacherlife, #teachersbelike, #teacherprob, #teachersprobs, #tiredteacher, #teachertired, #teacherfunny, #teachertok, #whyillnevergoback #wingb 3/9/2024 | |

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The study, in its two-part process of survey and interview, revealed the following themes that emerged as most vital during data analyzation: adaptability, support, relatability, and collaboration. Each theme reflected the educators use of SNSs as forms of self-PD and within the criticism of traditional PD often offered at the school and/or district level.

(1) Secondary educators use SNSs as a digital, accessible, resource center and an emotional support system.

Social Network Sites (SNSs) have a search engine within the appliable or website that allows users to look for content that is based on their interests and needs. There can be a search bar within the SNSs or a feature such as hashtags that tie videos of various themes together. SNSs such as Facebook and TikTok will suggest related content based on your interactions within the platform. Regardless of how educators use the platform for their personal learning, they can access the content and resources they feel are important to them. From the data collected, educators are accessing SNSs to find resources about lesson planning, curriculum, and classroom management. They are accessing SNSs for resources, support, and the opportunity to build a digital PLC community. While resources could be considered support, for this study's purposes support is the social interaction that supports the emotional needs of a teacher.

Respondents in the interviews discussed that one of the factors that drove educators to SNSs as a form of self-PD was COVID-19. Educators worldwide faced an unprecedented time of navigating how to support their students and themselves during online learning. Through social networks, educators could see how others in their profession were addressing the changes to classroom teaching during the pandemic. While the use of SNSs as a form of self-PD is not a

new concept, teachers during COVID-19 were forming digital learning communities that created

relationships that lasted long after the return to in-person teaching. With the sudden shift to

online learning these platforms acted as a lifeline to teachers forced into online teaching (Pokhrel

& Chhetri, 2021; Riady et al., 2022)

SNSs provide an opportunity for teachers to combat the feelings of isolation as they can

see the real issues facing other educators and how they approach the situation. Educators can

collaborate with others in the digital learning community that SNSs provide. As previously

mentioned, this can be done through interactions such as commenting, liking, sharing, or

following content and/or the content creator. Content creators will sometimes respond to

comments or direct messages that are sent to them by users. If a post, such as a comment or a

respond video, is posted with a public setting (meaning any users of the platform can see and

interact with the content), other users of the platform can interact with it too. Educators will use

SNSs not just to gather resources, but they also use it to collaborate with others. Users of SNSs

can comment on other users' posts and, depending on the platform, direct message the original

poster. Communication between members of the online digital community is not just restricted to

content creators and their viewers, but is open for anyone that accesses the platform. Some

educators use SNSs to network with each other to build a community with individuals that they

have not met in person, but others also use SNSs to maintain relationships with individuals that

they have met but do not have direct in person access to. What respondents stated in the study

confirmed the current findings in literature that stated educators went to SNSs to combat feelings

of isolation and share resources as well as fill the gap left from traditional PD (Bissessar, 2014;

Goodyear et al., 2019; Nelimarkka, 2021; Prestridge, 2019). This study pushes these ideas

further than the current literature show that SNSs are beneficial as they have created a

community and resource bank that educators are still using even after returning to in person

learning that is based on their needs and time. The ties created during the pandemic's emergency

became invisible connected strings of support between teachers well after the emergency ended

which is seen by teacher still actively using SNSs as a form of self-PD.

(2) The appeals of using SNSs as a form of PD for secondary English teachers is the easily accessible of the platforms and the power of choice.

Educators find social networking sites (SNSs) highly appealing due to their exceptional

data collection capabilities. These platforms can be accessed through smart phones, tablets, or

computers at any time and from any location, making them highly convenient. They offer

information in various formats, allowing users to handpick the platform that best caters to their

learning needs. Through the interview process, participants affirmed their preference for video

format on SNSs like TikTok and Facebook, while others found images with textual support

(posts, status, and comments) more helpful. Traditional professional development programs do

not provide differentiated instructions to cater to different learning styles, unlike SNSs.

Educators have the freedom to choose how they receive information and interact with the content

and people they prefer at their own pace.

Secondary English educators can benefit from using SNSs both as search engines to find

relevant topics and as platforms to generate ideas from content suggestions provided by the

platform's algorithm. During the interview process, participants discussed that when using SNSs

as search engines, they had the option to choose the platform and content creator that worked

best for them. While some may find SNSs overwhelming due to the constant flow of

information, others may enjoy the search features that SNSs offer, such as hashtags that connect

videos of the same theme together or a search bar. Educators can also use SNSs to search for

individuals like authors or presenters they have interacted with within their in-person PLC. Educators have the power to decide who they interact with and to what degree. During the interview process, it was discovered that educators value conference PD over school and district level PD because they have the freedom to select what they attend and who they see.

On SNSs, educators are given autonomy on the content they interact with and the level of that interaction. Educators are also able to follow content creators or choose to block content creators if they do not agree with them or prefer not to see the topics presented. SNSs are designed for users to scroll (or view) the information at their pace. Some platforms will offer suggestions by showing the users videos or ads the user may like to view based on previous interactions and profile information (Anderson, 2020; Hartung et al., 2020). Users of SNSs are not restricted to finishing a video, viewing images, or reading a post; they can move from the content without fear of negative ramifications. As the interview progressed, participants expressed fear of sharing their views on presenters and of the lack of feeling support of the districts/schools they work for when voicing their needs as educators. On SNSs educators can either share their views on the information or content creator in a digital space by commenting or reacting to the information present without fear of jeopardizing their employment which was seen in a study done by Carpenter & Harvey (2019). While there are conflicting viewpoints about SNSs being a negative influence or toxic online environment, those who use the platforms can decide what and how they interact in the digital space (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). Research studies done by Damico & Krutka (2018), Goodyear et al. (2019), Prestridge (2019) and Lou et al. (2020) support the conclusion that SNSs can provide educators with the opportunity to create a digital learning community so long as they are reflective of the information they are gathering as well as who is providing the information (Damico & Krutka, 2018; Goodyear et al. 2019;

Prestridge, 2019; Lou et al., 2020). This idea was seen within the interview participants and

several stated that they will research who is posting the content as well as if they have the

authority in the subject area. Lou et al. (2020) also support the idea that SNSs are accessible

regardless of time and day and that educators can decide who and what they interact with.

(3) Secondary English Teachers implement what they have learned from SNSs in their

classroom and practices of teaching by examining what they have learned and adapting

to meet the needs of their students.

Participants shared in their interviews that SNSs offer a wide range of content. However,

it is important to note that the information presented may not always be suitable for the specific

needs and requirements of teachers who use the platform. Educators who use SNSs for self-

learning must exercise caution as not everything posted on these sites is valid or effective in their

classroom without modifications. Although SNSs can provide an unfiltered look into an

educator's life, it is crucial to understand that teachers have different experiences, classroom

demographics, and needs. Therefore, the information presented on SNSs needs to be adapted to

fit the environment where it will be used.

When teachers collect resources from SNSs, they can look at the content and the

individual who created it to determine if it is of substance and value. Anyone can post on SNSs if

they create an account, which means the information presented may not be from a reliable source

that the teacher trusts. Unlike in-person PD, educators can decide not to interact with a content

creator or information that they share if they determine that they do not value the content creator

and/or the information that is presented. Participants also shared that with in-person professional

development, they feel pressure to use what they have learned in the PD as administrators often

looks to see that the professional development is instituted in the classroom, whether the teacher finds it useful for their classroom needs and/or experience level. When an educator finds something, this could be a lesson plan or a classroom management strategy, that they find value in they are more than likely willing to try it out in their teaching practices in a meaningful way. Once the teachers have tried what they learned from SNSs in their classroom or their own teaching practice, they can determine if it will be used again in the future. This may not be true for PD in school that is mandated. The participants shared that they were pressured not to speak up or question the PDs that were being presented at the time due to administration or an instructional coach being presented in the room. The participants were worried that they would be viewed in a negative light if they shared their dislike of a presenter, or the information being presented.

(4a) SNSs can be effective, due to the accessibility and updated information presented.

One negative element with in-person PD discussed was the notation that information is presented, but there is no instruction on how to implement it effectively in a classroom that has students with various needs. For example, students who are multiple language learners or in the special education program may need modification or additional resources that are not shared within the traditional PD. The information presented during traditional PD is done quickly and offers little collaboration time which can affect how teachers implement the information in their classroom. However, SNSs allow teachers to go back to the original source material, ask questions and find others who have tried the lesson plan or shared their resources in their classroom but in a modified way. This can provide some guidelines for others regarding how to adapt what they have learned to fit their classroom.

During the interview process, there was a mention of using popular culture, such as singers, and technology in a new way to help students understand the materials and skills being presented. SNSs allow educators to see what interests their students and use those interests in the classroom. For example, a popular singer like Taylor Swift, which bridges the gap between them and their students who may not understand their interests or popular culture. Popular culture, which also includes SNSs, can provide new products for students to create, such as the boast as tweet activity discussed during the interview process. Along with gathering new information to support students' knowledge growth, educators can find new ways to use technology. Technology has become a large part of education, and teachers have been trying to find a way to use it within their classroom. However, many technology platforms, like Google Slides, for example, have features that can be overwhelming to discover and use within a classroom setting. SNSs have provided new ways for teachers to use the technology they already have access to in a way that helps their students gather the information and produce the desired results to demonstrate that they have mastered the necessary skills. The ability for a teacher to view the video about technology multiple times or read the posts and directions over and over helps teachers to feel comfortable and enact technical tools with confidence, based on interview responses.

(4b) SNSs are an effective form of PD for Secondary educators because they put the teacher at the center of learning. However, SNSs can be ineffective if the community associated with the content or content creator is negative.

As per the participants, SNSs are an effective and convenient form of self-learning PD that educators can access and utilize within their classroom and teaching practices. SNSs provide teachers with accessibility regardless of their location or the time of day, making it a powerful

tool for self-learning. In-person PD sessions are limited to a specific time and location, whereas SNSs offer various options for users to find what suits their teaching style and their student population. SNSs provide opportunities for users to build a digital professional learning community and interact with others, with the added benefit of being able to remain passive observers if they prefer. In contrast, in-person PD sessions require interaction with attendants and presenters, which can be uncomfortable for some participants. Educators who use SNSs for self-learning PD can also personalize their learning by choosing the platform that best suits their learning style, making the experience more meaningful. Teachers can create learning that is centered on their needs and preferences, providing a more enriching experience.

Research reflects the participants' sentiments that educators oftentimes struggle to find the motivation to attend traditional PDs. Teachers sometimes feel that the information presented does not match their content, grade level, and does not provide examples of application in classrooms that are like those within their school (Alberth, 2018; DeMonte & Center for American Progress, 2013); these ideas were reflected within the participants during the interviews. Research such as DeMonte & Center For American Progress (2013), Macia & Garcia (2018) and Nelimarkka (2021), found that teachers need to have a chance to collaborate with others and have discussions about how the content that is being shared within the PD would be successful within their classroom and with the various needs of their students (DeMonte & Center for American Progress, 2013; Macia & Garcia (2018); Nelimarkka (2021). This implies that the conversations must extend beyond one session to a longer time. In person PD that includes opportunities for extended collaboration is more successful according to several interview participants. It is important for educators to be mindful of what and who they are interacting with and how it affects their learning. Teachers will not receive the benefits that come

with the use of these platforms as resources (Damico & Krutka, 2018) if they are just taking information and resource without thinking about how they can adapt it and use it within their classroom.

As previously discussed, SNSs, while beneficial to users, can be ineffective due to the overwhelming amount of information that is presented online. This theme reemerged in research question four – What is effective and ineffective about middle school and high school English teachers' uses of SNSs for professional development and implementation in the classroom? During the interview process, participants stated that there was so much information presented online; while that was a great thing, they found it could be overwhelming when they were searching for a particular idea or resource. In addition, there was no process to limit adding content and comments that were being posted to educators. There is also no vetting process to ensure that the people who are sharing on these platforms understand teaching and how education works. Users that do not have a background or experience in education can share their insights. Anyone that creates an account can post whatever they would like on SNSs without anyone checking to see if the poster has the credentials to participate or if the information is accurate. This is a negative aspect of SNS that is not found in the in-person PD as educators may have to research creators to determine if the information, they are presenting is not only valuable but is also correct. Having to research or determine if information is creditable can be an ineffective use of time when teachers are trying to find quick information.

The participants also found that SNSs can also be ineffective due to the toxic PLC that can be created. Community members on SNSs can comment on a public post and sometimes what is posted is negative. A community can be created based on teacher shaming, blaming students for teaching failures, and teachers that are only seeking out resources because of poor

planning. During the interview process participants discussed how they would actively avoid toxic PLC regardless of if the main information being presented was valuable to them. Educators who are seeking out support on SNSs will often not use information or interact with a content creator if there is too much negativity within the comment section; this can lead to an educator removing themselves from a community and potentially losing out on valuable information and resources. In addition, an issue that causes educators to avoid using social networking sites is the fear of losing one's job as those who are in higher positions, such as the district office, may view the use of SNSs, or comments made by educators in a negative light (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). While educators can create private profiles, they cannot control what those who do have access to their profile or comments that they post do with that information. This can lead to educators avoiding interacting with some platforms (Damico & Krutka, 2018).

Social Capital Theory Reflection

Social capital theory is not a stagnant idea and changes depending on the culture and climate of the world (Bourdieu, 1986). Individuals adapt and change to the world around them which causes social capital theory to change; the introduction of SNSs impacts how social capital is created. Social capital theory originally was based on people creating connections due to several factors such as family, geographical location, employment, common interests, and organization groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988); however, people are no longer bound to the traditional ideas of creating relationships as SNSs provide various platforms that are not dependent on geographical locations, employment, or organization groups. While SNSs do work with users to help them find connections based on common interests, the level of these interests can be superficial and limited to one factor, despite this the human capital still develops regardless of the depth of connection. During the research process participants discussed that

they do feel as if they relate to content creators and from those feelings of relatability, they place

value on their knowledge and resources and place those creators within their professional

learning communities (Bourdieu, 1986; Vorhaus, 2014). SNSs change how individuals

understand social capital and how they build relationships.

As the interview progressed, participants discussed what they found helpful on SNSs and

two of those themes that came from those discussions center on support and relatability which

are subcategories of community. Previous research has discussed that social capital theory

believes that relationships are created either consciously or unconsciously (Bourdieu, 1986)

however, the data that was collected from the interview participants relieves that when it comes

to creating relationships of value in a digital space, there is more thought placed on to creating

those ties. Due to how various SNSs work, maintaining those relationships is relatively easy as

all one must do is click a follow button and the content creator now becomes an immediately part

of the user's social capital. Features such as joining Facebook Groups on Facebook (Facebook,

2023) or following a content creator on TikTok, which allows you to see their videos quicker

(TikTok, 2023), allow users to create and keep those relationships easier than in the past when

people were limited by location and time. Other features, such as hashtags, allow users to find

their community and people who share their interests in a more streamline fashion; people

building a community based on shared interest and being a part of a community such as teachers,

is an important factor of social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) that some would

say impacts the way that SNSs were created and will be updated in the future. More in-depth

studies need to be performed regarding social capital evolution in a digital space.

Future Research

This current research study further supports the established research conducted by Goodyear et al. (2019) and Carpenter & Harvey, (2019) who discuss that SNSs can be effective platforms for self-learning. During the interview process, it was interesting to see that regardless of years of experience, age, or comfort level with SNSs, all participants tried and found value within the platform they decided to interact with. While participants all used SNSs as a form of self-PD, the field of teacher education would benefit from an in-depth examination of the results of using information gathered from SNSs in a classroom. In addition, an in-depth case study or ethnographic study following a teacher and examining the use of SNSs and how they adapt and refine strategies in their classrooms would help the field understand this new use of technology to support teachers in their learning and refining of their craft.

Suggestions for SNSs

One possible outcome with the research performed during this study is to create a SNS made with teachers in mind. Current SNSs are open to any users and those users can post content regardless of accuracy, knowledge, or purpose. This means that anyone can provide advice to an educator or even present themselves as a legitimate source of information for educational purposes. Therefore, a platform created for educators needs to be a space for educators only. The platform also needs to consider the various levels of experience with navigating SNSs that an educator may have when designing the platform. With these ideas in mind, I have several suggestions that a SNS made for teachers would need to have to be an effective platform for educators who would like to use SNSs as a form of self-learning PD.

First, the platform needs to be easily accessible which means that it should be designed for a web-based platform and an application platform download from an app store. Users would

be able to access the platform using their computers or smartphone, which would allow educators to access the platform when they need it as they would not be bound by internet or data access; they could use either platform. The two platforms should also be similar in visual nature so that a user that primarily accesses the platform on their smartphone will still be able to navigate within a web browser with the same ease because they are already familiar with the design.

Second, the platform needs to have search engines that have filters to help streamline the research process within the platform. There needs to be grade level, content level and lesson subject filters that can provide videos that are themed together. This would mean that to post content, creators would be asked to select the categories that best support their content's themes. By having creators preselect the categories, it will make it easier when it comes to filtering out content that is not relevant to the user's needs. Another filter feature could be designed to only show videos or to show videos with detailed directions attached; this way users could still interact with the platform in ways that best suits their learning style.

Third, before a user can create a profile, they must upload identification that shows they are an educator. This can be a teaching certificate number or a school id that is checked and validated through a third-party company or a person that monitors the site. By having users upload their identification as an educator, it will limit the users who are not within the field of educator and therefore control some miss information that can be presented on SNSs where anyone is able to post information. There would need to be adjustments to identifying pre-service teachers and retried teachers as they can provide value and take information away from the platform. An additional filter for uploading content or comments can be placed within the program that will hide it from certain groups such as users who are in administration. By

building in a type of blocking system, users may feel safer to share their thoughts and ideas as they can keep administrators from seeing their content.

Finally, this platform can be used as a data source for those who plan traditional professional development. Information on content shared, the types of interactions and basic information on users of the platforms can be gathered and shared with those who create and design traditional PD. The goal would be for those who create traditional PD to take the data and see what they are lacking and adjust to make in-person PD making them more meaningful.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include that the research was conducted in one region of the country and one state. It is possible that teachers use social media as a professional tool may vary in different states. In addition, some teachers in areas of the state that are rural and have problems receiving cell service and internet did not get included in the study because they do not use social media due to their location. Their lack of ability to access platforms and technology seems an important aspect of the overall conversation that is not a part of this study.

This study is a case study. A case study tells the study of participants bound in that case. It is up to the reader to decide if this case study is attributable to their own situation. There may be teachers who did not participate that may have different views than that of the participants in this case study did not experience or express.

Conclusion

SNSs have been and are still being used as a platform for educators to gather information, find support and create professional learning communities. There is a gap within the research regarding not only content and grade level specific practices, but the level of effectiveness

practices and resources gathered from SNSs within a classroom. It is recommended that a case study is performed examining an educator that uses SNSs, how they implement the knowledge gathered in their classroom and how the students react.

Another suggestion for future research would be to examine what educators like about individual SNSs in-depth and develop a platform that is created by teachers for teachers to support those who would like to use SNSs as a form of self-PD but are skeptical about using platforms that are accessible to any user regardless of understanding or experience in education.

Future research also needs to be done regarding what an in-person PD needs to be effective for teachers. While there have been some discussions about what is not working regarding one-short PD, there is limited research regarding how to create an impactful and meaningful PD for in-person learners.

The Grammarly platform was used in this dissertation to identify sentences with poor grammar uses and passive language.

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