ENGAGING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN LEARNING THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKING

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Abstract

One fast-growing facet of new literacies is social networking. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of social networking on preservice teachers’ knowledge of professional organizations and resources. In this study, Facebook was utilized to expose preservice teachers to professional resources. A survey was administered to participants in a pretest and posttest format to measure knowledge of professional resources and trends in education.

This article examines the process and data resulting from the use of social networks. Data provided both quantitative and qualitative results that support the use of social networks as a tool to expose preservice teachers to professional organizations and resources.
The International Reading Association (IRA) stated that the literacies used by today’s students are much different from those of their parents, or even those of students just a decade ago (IRA, 2009). In May 2009, the IRA Board of Directors adopted a position statement titled “New Literacies and the 21st Century Technologies,” which noted that in order “to become fully literate in today’s world, students must become proficient in the literacies of the 21st century technologies” (p. 1). IRA proposed literacy educators have a responsibility to integrate information and communication technologies into the curriculum, to prepare students for the future.

Other terms for information and communication technologies in literature included digital literacies, new literacies, and media literacies. The annual survey of literacy leaders (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2009) labeled one of the 2010 topic categories new literacies/digital literacies. According to the survey, new literacies/digital literacies are among the hot topics in the field of reading education for 2010. In addition, at least 75% of the survey respondents agreed new literacies/digital literacies should be hot.

What are new literacies, and why are they a hot topic? While literacy includes the ability to read and write, new literacies encompass a broader view of reading and writing in a world of technology. Researchers are now defining literacies within new technologies such as gaming software, video technologies, technologies that establish communities on the Internet, search engines, webpages, etc. (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). In examining literacies within today’s social context, Leu, et al. (2004) reported that there are social forces at work today that frame the changes to literacy that we are experiencing. Among those forces is the rapid emergence of the Internet as a powerful new technology for information and communication.
Others supported the notion that information and communication technologies that power complex social systems are rising in popularity and becoming integral to daily life around the globe (Schlager, Farooq, Fusco, Schank, & Dwyer, 2009).

One fast-growing facet of new literacies is social networking. Social networking is the result of the read-write Web, which enables interactive online participation and collaboration on a scale not possible during the 1990s (Knobel & Laankshear, 2009). Popular forms of social software included sites like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, which bring together online networks, announcement spaces, group members, and interest groups within one online location (www.myspace.com; www.facebook.com; www.twitter.com). With increasing mobile phone popularity and enhanced cell phone technology, social networks may be accessed anytime and anyplace (including the classroom). Today’s online social networks are predominately free to join, which makes them extremely widespread. According to Schlager, et al. (2009), “the popularity of social networking among youth and teachers of the net generation is undeniable” (p. 86).

The National School Board Association (NSBA, 2007) reported that 96% of students with online access have used social networking technologies and more than 50% communicate online about school work. In school districts with structured online communities, participation by teachers and administrations includes nearly half of staff members. The NSBA suggested teachers are comfortable and knowledgeable enough to use social networking for educational purposes with students. Schlager et al. (2009) noted the potential for online social networks to become a central context for student and teacher learning and a catalyst for instructional improvement. According to Schlager et al., “research must help education communities convert the current enthusiasm for online social networking into reliable evidence of how, when, and why
online social networks do and do not advance learning, and we must develop scalable and replicable models that maximize the value and benefits of emerging social networking models and technologies” (p. 87). The study presented in this paper addresses the use of social networking for instructional improvement and investigates how, when, and why social networks do and do not advance learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

Evidence supports the popularity of social networks and their potential to advance learning. In this study, we utilized social networking with preservice teachers. Our research focused on Facebook, primarily because it was the social network used by the participating preservice teachers. Facebook’s widespread use has been well documented. According to Heiberger and Harper (2008), Facebook held an 85% market share of four-year U.S. colleges and universities. “Facebook puts a massive amount of information and communication power at a student’s fingertips, making it possibly the ultimate synthesis of student-relevant data” (Heiberger & Harper, 2008, p. 20). According to Facebook statistics (2010), the Facebook social network had more than 400 million active users with 50% of its users logging on in any given day. In addition, Facebook had more than five billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) shared each week and more than three million active Pages. More than 20 million people joined Pages each day, and Pages created more than 5.3 billion fans (Facebook, 2010).

Among the Pages accessible on Facebook were educational Pages that we considered related to the curriculum our preservice teachers encounter during their undergraduate coursework. We realized that utilizing Pages of professional organizations in the field of
education was a potential source of information for preservice teachers that educators needed to examine. Since Facebook and other social networks provide social interaction and information streaming to users, it is logical that educators could utilize such a powerful network in the classroom. The question is how to utilize the network.

Universities have tapped into the social network as a method to recruit and inform students. In addition, some instructors/teachers have used social networks as a means of communicating with students. While researchers have analyzed Facebook as a communication tool in an educational setting (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Schlager, et al., 2009; Vorlet, 2009), concerns regarding the use of social networks such as Facebook included teacher professionalism; social issues where roles between friend and teacher are crossed; and student complaints that faculty members would judge them or use Facebook against them (Heiberger & Harper, 2008).

In this study, social networking was not used as a mode for communication. Instead, we examined an alternative dimension of Facebook that avoided ethical issues and that potentially enhanced pre-service teachers’ professional knowledge. We proposed the use of Facebook as a means of exposing pre-service teachers to professional resources. A goal of teacher education programs is to introduce students to professional resources. Traditional assignments in teacher education include article reviews, which are intended to expose preservice teachers to professional journals as well as resources, topics, and issues in education. In this article, we address an alternative to the traditional article review. As Kress (2003) stated, “the former constellation of medium of book and mode of writing is giving way, and in many domains has already given way, to the new constellation of medium of screen and mode of image” (p. 9). Writing an article review doesn’t guarantee an understanding of professional resources. Students
could become a fan of organizations through Facebook at no monetary expense. As a result, they received informational postings throughout the week, often in a weblink or video format. The rationale behind the use of social networks as a tool for professional exposure included the idea that the internet is this generation’s defining technology for literacy (Coiro & Dobler, 2007), and students will utilize popular media such as Facebook. Why not use one Page to access professional information?

Social networks such as Facebook provided access to valuable resources for educators. Becoming a fan was a fast growing use of social networks, with six million plus users joining Pages each day (Facebook, 2010). Users could become a fan of their favorite restaurant, favorite movie, or favorite college. In addition, users could become a fan of Pages posted by professional organizations that serve as resources/advocates of teacher education. Examples of professional Pages included the International Reading Association, the International Dyslexia Association, National Council for Teachers of Mathematics and the National Education Association. By joining the Pages of these professional organizations on Facebook, students received information about trends and issues in education.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of social networking on preservice teachers’ knowledge of professional organizations and professional resources. Pre-service teachers in two separate courses (math/science strategy courses and reading courses) at a small university accessed professional organizations through Facebook as a part a course assignment. A survey was administered to the students in a pretest and posttest format to measure knowledge of professional resources and trends in education. The study examined effects of the use of Facebook as a tool to enhance professional knowledge.
Methodology

The research question guiding this study was *Are popular social networks effective venues for introducing preservice teachers to resources and issues in education?* This research question posed a broad look at using new literacies for learning. This article includes quantitative and qualitative findings collected from prospective teachers’ survey responses after using social networks to connect them to educational organizations and resources. This section outlines the framework for the study and presents a course assignment that integrates social networks into education.

Participants

Participants for the study included two groups of pre-service teachers (N=51) enrolled in required undergraduate courses for their program of study at a small university in Central Texas. All but one of the participants were female. Participation was optional, and two students chose not to participate in the Facebook assignment. One student made the choice not to participate based on a lack of time to log onto Facebook. The other decision not to participate was associated with the student’s computer problems. The ages of the participants varied. Students that chose to participate were both traditional college students and non-traditional college students. The control group (n=26) consisted of students in a math/science course taught by one of the researchers while the experimental group (n=25) consisted of students in a reading course taught by the other researcher. The students in both courses completed a pretest and posttest survey, which is described below.

Data Collection
The study was conducted in the fall 2009 university semester. A pretest - posttest quasi-experimental group design was used to assess the change in knowledge of professional resources. Data sources included a pretest-posttest survey that consisted of 10 Likert-type statements (see Table 1). We developed the survey to measure preservice teacher's knowledge of professional organizations and resources. Participants responded on a five point scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In addition, participants were provided an opportunity to respond to each statement with a written answer supporting their answer choice. The written responses provided qualitative data.

Table 1 Likert Scale Survey Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Explain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand what a professional organization is.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am knowledgeable about the types of resources/information professional</td>
<td>Provide example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizations provide for educators.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use professional resources for information in my field.</td>
<td>Provide example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand trends in education.</td>
<td>Name a recent trend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I utilize online resources to locate educational information from</td>
<td>Example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am knowledgeable about professional journals relating to education.</td>
<td>Example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I currently subscribe to a professional journal or to a professional</td>
<td>Example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>website.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to join (or renew membership in) a professional organization when</td>
<td>Example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I begin teaching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intend to utilize online resources in lesson planning.</td>
<td>Example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am likely to investigate professional resources for educators in my</td>
<td>Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>free time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The experimental group was exposed to a Professional Resource Study assignment. The assignment required preservice teachers to become a fan of a professional organization, such as
IRA, Reading Rockets, or NEA. Upon becoming a fan, students were to 1) monitor an account to check for feeds posted by an organization; 2) examine postings, looking for topics of particular interest; 3) complete a final product. The assignment’s final product was a reflection of the process and a summary of one of the followed links posted by a professional organization. Because the experimental group included students enrolled in a Reading Language Arts course, participants were required to join (become a fan of) an organization focusing on literacy. The researchers selected organizations that are known to support literacy professionals through a wide range of resources that include accurate and up to date information in the field of literacy. Participants followed organizations utilizing a social network for 10 weeks. After 10 weeks, both the control group and the experimental group completed the posttest. Posttest results are described below.

The control group did not participate in the Facebook assignment. However, the control group did receive typical exposure to professional resources through article review assignments, exposure to websites, and class discussions. Participants taking both courses simultaneously were omitted from the study.

Data were also collected from the social network Pages. While all participants were exposed to information provided by professional organizations during the study, participants in the experimental group received information electronically through a digital medium. As participants followed the organizations on Facebook, the researchers studied postings to learn about types of resources and information accessible through social networks. Through data collection and the process of following professional Pages, we found that organizations provided different types of online information. While we could not require students to look at all of the items posted by professional organizations on Facebook, we could access Facebook to monitor
the information that can potentially be accessed by a fan. The researchers monitored various sites from August 2009 to December 2009. Sites monitored included the International Reading Association (IRA), Reading Rockets (RR) the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the National Education Association (NEA). The following discussion presents detailed insight into the type of information participants received through this assignment and through their interactions with professional organizations using Facebook.

**Interaction on Facebook**

Some organizations like IRA and RR posted information daily. Other sites were less active. After becoming a fan of an organization, preservice teachers received newsfeeds from the organizations they joined. In order to receive the newsfeed, the user must simply log onto their Facebook Page. Facebook users could either read the posted newsfeeds, or they could access their Pages and select the desired organization. By selecting an organization, participants were selecting a link that took them to the webpage of the organization. Newsfeeds could then be read within the same Page.

**Reading Rockets**

Through observing classroom discussions and submitted assignments, the researchers found that Reading Rockets seemed to be the most popular Page with the participants. Reading Rockets differed from the other professional organizations in that it targets parents as well as educators. According to the website, “Reading Rockets is a national multimedia project offering information and resources on how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how caring adults can help” (Reading Rockets, 2008). Reading Rockets partners with PBS television
programs and is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

Reading Rockets posted information almost daily, and the information covered a broad variety of topics. For example, on August 25, 2009, they posted a link about building print awareness. The link led to a helpful article. RR also posted, “A weekly classroom newsletter is a great way to keep school-to-home communication going. Try our easy-to-use template: http://ow.ly/16zw.” Their September 9th post asked if handwriting is still important and provided a link to vote in a poll. Another link provided access to a link for books and periodicals for readers with print disabilities (Sept. 11, 2009). The information posted was relevant to the coursework and provided exposure to many resources for the preservice teacher participants.

**International Reading Association**

IRA posted several updates per week, which included items of interest for literacy educators such as national standards, notifications of journal publications, tips for teachers, and educational resources. According to IRA’s website (IRA, 1996-2010), the organization has been committed to worldwide literacy since 1956. IRA has more than 70,000 members, and the organization supports literacy professionals through a wide range of resources, advocacy efforts, volunteerism, and professional development activities.

The following examples are postings from fall 2009:

1.) Take a look! The Standards for Reading Professionals 2010 Draft is available for public comment from September 15 – November 1. We need your opinion about the content and the new format. We encourage you to complete a brief survey to share your comments with us. More details at the link below (IRA, September 15, 2009).
2.) A DVD set of "Reading as a Psycholinguistic Guessing Game," an institute organized by Ken Goodman at IRA's 2009 Annual Convention in Minneapolis, is available through the Center for Expansion of Language and Thinking. Find out more (IRA, September 18, 2009).

3.) What kind of online tools are you using in your classroom? Read about using Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 in *The Reading Teacher* article linked below, and then join in a conversation with the article authors under the "Discussions" tab (IRA, September 24, 2009).

4.) Just published - the October issue of *The Reading Teacher* (IRA, September 29, 2009).

**National Education Association**

NEA has crusaded for the rights of educators and children since 1857. They provide magazines and newsletters to members, and they post links on their Page to distribute relevant information regarding trends in education. The links often lead to news articles. Sample posts included the following:

1.) Not in isolation: Research shows that teachers improve their teaching when their colleagues improve theirs (September 29, 2009).

2.) Students live in a Digital World. Are schools ready to join them (September 29, 2009)?

3.) Latest edition of the National Education Association: Is this going too far? Teachers banned from contacting students on social networking sites... What do you think (October 24, 2009)?
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

Although NCTM was not utilized by the participants in the Reading/Language Arts class, it was monitored by the researchers. NCTM did not post links during the summer of 2009. However, they posted math problems during the school year. For example, they posted a Monday math problem, a Tuesday math problem, etc. Fans could participate in posting answers and responses. Other posts announced opportunities for professional development.

Facebook statistics (2010) reported that the average user becomes a fan of four Pages each month. We tracked the number of members on the Pages of professional organizations to monitor their growth. Table 2 provides the number of fans for professional organizations as they were monitored throughout the study.

Table 2 Fan Numbers of Professional Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th># of fans in June 2009</th>
<th># of fans in October 2009</th>
<th># of fans in February 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRA</td>
<td>1104</td>
<td>3239</td>
<td>4240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR</td>
<td>2895</td>
<td>4771</td>
<td>5775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>1610</td>
<td>3439</td>
<td>4615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDA</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCTM</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>1262</td>
<td>2064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that the number of fans from June 2009 to February 2010 doubled and in some instances nearly tripled. The growing popularity of these Pages suggested an interest in the use of social networking as a source of information. It must be noted that Facebook (2010) has recently changed the language for Pages from Fan to Like. While the terminology changed, the
concept of Pages has not. Instead of selecting *Become a fan* to join a Page, users will select *Like* to join a Page.

**Data Analysis**

The participant responses on the survey pretest and posttest provided the data for this mixed methods study. Statistical analysis included the ANCOVA to compare the mean scores from the survey. The pretest score was the covariate to control for small preexisting differences between the groups since random assignment was not used. The independent variable was the professional resource assignment, and the dependent variable was awareness of professional resources as measured by the posttest. SPSS Statistics 17.0 was the data analysis software. A probability level of $p < 0.05$ was the standard to determine if results were statistically significant. Qualitative information was analyzed as themes emerged.

**Results**

Preservice teachers in the experimental scored slightly higher on the posttest survey. The survey consisted of 10 Likert-type items. Individual survey scores could range from 10 to 50. Students that failed to answer all ten questions were omitted from data analysis, resulting in the sample size ($n$) for the experimental group and the control group. The mean scores are presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>31.6087</td>
<td>6.91335</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>33.5652</td>
<td>4.64000</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ANCOVA was used as the statistic to determine if the differences were significant. The ANCOVA controlled for initial differences in the pretest by calculating the pretest as the covariate. The ANCOVA indicated there is no statistically significant main effect between groups ($F = 1.711$ and $p = .198$).

Two survey items were most directly related to exposure to resources and issues in education. Therefore, these items were analyzed independently. These items were also items that all participants answered. Therefore, the sample size included all 51 participants. Survey item one required participants to rate their knowledge of professional organizations. The mean results for posttest question one are provided in Table 4.

Table 4 Rating of Knowledge of Professional Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.4231</td>
<td>.94543</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>4.2400</td>
<td>.72342</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ANCOVA was used as the statistic to determine if the differences were significant. The ANCOVA controlled for initial differences in the pretest by calculating the pretest score as a covariate. The ANCOVA indicated there was a statistically significant main effect between groups ($F = 10.903$ and $p = .002$). Therefore, students in the experimental group reported a greater knowledge of professional organizations after the Facebook assignment.

Survey item two required participants to rate their knowledge about the types of resources/information professional organizations provide for educators. The mean results for posttest item two are provided in Table 5.

Table 5 Rating of Knowledge of Available Resources/Information
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.0385</td>
<td>.99923</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>4.0800</td>
<td>.70238</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ANCOVA was used as the statistic to determine if the differences were significant. The ANCOVA controlled for initial differences in the pretest by calculating the pretest score as a covariate. The ANCOVA indicated there was a statistically significant main effect between groups (F = 17.255 and p = .000). Therefore, students in the experimental group reported greater knowledge of resources and information after completing the Facebook assignment. Analyzing survey items one and two provided significant quantitative data.

Participants’ written responses to each survey statement provided information about their knowledge of professional resources. The written responses on the pretest were compared to responses on the posttest and were analyzed qualitatively. We again concentrated our analysis on survey items one and two. We provide here only a brief illustration of the overall results.

Differences between group explanations were analyzed in an effort to understand the reasons behind the survey results. *What was the difference in the experimental group and control group?* After rating their knowledge of professional organizations (item one), participants were prompted to explain their response. Responses for both groups demonstrated that participants gained knowledge about professional organizations and resources. Participant explanations emerged on the posttest to include accurate ideas conveying knowledge of professional organizations. Responses varied but included ideas about organizations as providers of *support, legal information, professional information,* and *ideas.* Some responses included one of these ideas while others may have included many of these ideas. The most significant change
in responses for both groups was a broader understanding of professional organizations. While pretest responses seemed to focus on one idea, which was primarily that organizations were legal/insurance providers, posttest responses demonstrated knowledge of professional organizations as services with multiple roles.

Comparison of groups was difficult because the control group participants did not all write responses to the open-ended survey items. Participants in the experimental group did write responses/explanations. The researchers do not have enough information to determine if the responses were left blank due to a lack of understanding or due to other factors. What was determined was that the experimental group’s answers were more thorough and indicated a greater (more explicit) understanding of the ideas mentioned above.

After rating their knowledge about types of resources/information professional organizations provide for educators (item two), participants were prompted to explain their response. Written explanations on the pretest survey for both groups reflected a lack of understanding of professional organizations as sources of information for educators. Participants could not explain the types of resources available from professional organizations. They lacked knowledge regarding how to utilize professional organizations in their field of study.

Responses for both groups on posttest survey item two demonstrated that participants gained knowledge about the types of resources/information available from professional organizations. Participant explanations evolved to include many services provided by professional organizations. Responses included the following categories of answers: articles/journals, books, liability insurance, ideas, regulations, standards, benefits, activities/lessons. In addition, participants realized that professional organizations represent the members in the legislative process. Again, not every participant in the control group wrote a
response to the survey item. The researchers determined that the experimental group’s answers were more thorough and indicated a greater (more explicit) understanding of the services mentioned above.

Posttest responses for the experimental group included concepts about professional organizations that were learned from exposure to professional organizations on Facebook. Experimental group responses included specific ideas they read online. For example, participants explained that organizations provide activities and lessons, and their responses included specific examples of activities provided. One student wrote about a phonemic awareness activity posted by Reading Rockets while another student mentioned a mystery reader activity that had been posted by Reading Rockets. Participants were exposed to a variety of information through their access to professional organizations on Facebook. While some class discussion resulted from postings encountered on Facebook, the various resources provided by professional organizations was not taught to participants. The researchers assumed the differences could be attributed to the independent variable.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined effects of the use of social networking as a tool to enhance professional knowledge. Data supported the use of social networks as a tool to expose preservice teachers to professional organizations and to trends and issues in education. Although there was no statistically significant main effect between groups on the Likert-type survey, researchers found statistically significant differences between groups’ pretest/posttest scores on survey items one and two. In addition, qualitative analysis suggested that participants gained knowledge about
professional organizations and resources through the independent variable, which was the professional resource assignment utilizing social networks.

The researchers introduced an alternative to the traditional article review. We did not determine greater success of one over the other. Instead, we suggest that using popular social networks may enhance preservice teachers’ knowledge of professional organizations and of trends and issues in education. Exposure to articles through professional journals does not always result in knowledge about the organization that produced the journal. However, by becoming a fan of the IRA, the Facebook user received notices when the journal was published. Students in the education program began to make connections regarding the type of information professional organizations provide as they interacted with organizations online. They recognized professional organizations and learned about resources provided by the organizations.

Social networking is not the only way to electronically access professional organizations. The more obvious way would be for a student to use a direct link to an organization’s website. The rationale behind using the social network in the course assignment (as opposed to a direct link for each organization) was to provide one link where multiple organizations could be accessed simultaneously. In addition, we knew social networks were highly popular among our students, and we wanted to engage them with a medium we knew they were likely to access. As professional information is posted as feeds on Facebook, group members may respond and interact with other members, just as users can interact with their friends on Facebook. The potential for motivation through a Facebook Page was an innovative way to introduce preservice teachers to professional organizations and to get students involved with discussions initiated on Facebook Pages. Student learning became more social, which potentially increased interest in learning. Interaction on Facebook often stimulated classroom discussions among the preservice
teachers. Bledsoe and Pilgrim (2011) collected student written reflections which included the following statements:

- I was amazed at how much information was out there for teachers. I was even more surprised to find it on Facebook.
- Facebook made it easy to keep up with the organizations and post feedback to discussions.
- I became a fan of the International Reading Association to find that social networking is not only used to generate content for teachers, but is the process of initiating, developing, and maintaining friendships and collegial or professional relationships for mutual benefit.

(p. 28)

Implications for Education

New literacies refer to new forms of literacy made possible by digital technology developments. The nature of literacy changes regularly and rapidly as the Internet and other communication technologies emerge. The challenge of new literacies is to integrate information and communication technologies into the curriculum to prepare students for the future. With this in mind, we sought an effective use of new literacies to advance learning by using social networking to intentionally connect students to professional organizations.

While the nature of literacy is changing, communication technologies are emerging as a widely popular facet of the Internet. Interaction with social networking is becoming a part of daily social activity. Integrating education into this social phenomenon is an effective way to promote continuous learning. These changes and trends support a need for educators to improve and adapt instruction in the classroom. While literacy becomes richer and more complex,
educators should adapt instruction and assignments that reflect these changes. Findings from our study suggest that educators need to devote attention to social networks as source of learning for pre-service teachers. Social networks are among the information and communication technologies of the future. We earlier cited an appeal for research that helps education communities convert the current enthusiasm for online social networking into reliable evidence of how, when, and why online social networks do and do not advance learning (Schlager et al., 2009). The findings from this study indicate utilizing social networks for professional information could promote learning in a social, engaging way. It is also probable that the students may continue to reap the benefits of the Pages after completing the assignment, since many students are using Facebook for social networking. Exposing pre-service teachers to professional organizations is a necessary component of teacher preparation, and social networking provides information at the touch of a key.
References


http://www.reading.org/General/AboutIRA/PositionStatements/21stCenturyLiteracies.asp


