

# Chapter 2

## Social Media in Teacher Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Social media's rise has affected human interactions in significant ways, and such media may support learning. But how to prepare teachers who can maximize the educational potential of these technologies remains unclear. In this chapter the authors aim to summarize and synthesize extant research concerning social media use in teacher education, specifically attending to methods, theories, and findings. They begin by defining and situating social media with an eye towards affordances and drawbacks. The authors discuss pertinent research through the lens of experiences various mediums afford individuals and groups, including enhanced interaction, discussion, collaboration, community, feedback, mentoring, and support. Opportunities and challenges associated with the use of social media in the preparation of teachers in and for the digital age are discussed, and the chapter concludes by detailing implications of the existing literature for theory, practice, and future research.*

### INTRODUCTION

The social media boom of the last decade has affected societal institutions, cultural practices, and communications in both intended and unforeseen ways. The web was once dominated by static sites that served as repositories of information, retroactively called Web 1.0, but such websites now coexist with Web 2.0 digital spaces where “the people formerly known as the audience” are able to generate content in a variety of ways (Rosen,

2012, p. 13). And, social media goes beyond just allowing content creation as it affords spaces for multidirectional interactions with people and communities that might not have otherwise been possible.

For students, teachers, and administrators, social media is more than a theoretical matter. Official policies and school practices concerning social media have often been variable and ambiguous with some decision-makers blocking social media sites, others embracing their use for innova-

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tive purposes, and many displaying ambivalence. However, social media use does not seem likely to abate any time soon and today's pre-service teachers will have to wrestle with the roles these technologies will play in their future classrooms and schools. Howard Rheingold (2012) contended that "the future of digital culture—yours, mine, and ours—depends on how well we learn to use the media that have infiltrated, amplified, distracted, enriched, and complicated our lives" (p. 1).

The use of social media in education can be strange terrain for many teachers who are used to environments with distinct boundaries. These technologies can blur temporal, geographical, and hierarchical confines that often characterize communication in more formal settings. In this chapter, we summarize and synthesize the extant literature pertinent to social media use in and for teacher education. After defining social media and its affordances for teaching and learning, we discuss criticisms and obstacles pertaining to social media use, related K-12 literature, and supplementary higher education articles beyond the realm of teacher education. This is followed by an explanation of methods and then the review and analysis of the literature, which informs both theory and practice of what has, will, and can be done with social media in teacher education.

## BACKGROUND

*Social media* is not easily defined (Mandiberg, 2012) as it is a "moving target" where "it sometimes feels as if the social media landscape changes too quickly to fully grasp and leaves scholars permanently lagging behind" (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010, p. 309). Although social media definitions and classifications can be ambiguous and fluid, there are similarities among the types of experiences various mediums encourage. Social media is generally characterized by digital platforms where users can create, share, and interact with content and each other in online collaborative spaces.

Accessibility and low barriers to participation typify social media tools, and the content created and/or shared by users includes text, photographs, videos, audio files, or some combination thereof.

While terms like *Web 2.0*, *participatory media*, *social networking*, or *authentic media* have been used both synonymously and distinctively, the term "social media" is used in this chapter for two reasons. First, "social media" is a broad term that did not arbitrarily limit the review of literature. Second, the "social" component distinguishes various mediums and uses. For example, while some Web 2.0 sites provide an accessible digital space for content (e.g., YouTube, blogs), not all such sites encourage or lead to frequent and substantive interactions in comment sections or elsewhere. On the other hand, social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook often lend themselves to more interactions as posts can lead to numerous "likes," "comments," or "shares" from fellow users. However, while a medium can encourage certain behaviors, it does not determine them and the specific technology tool is often less important than the quality of content and interactions crafted by users.

## Affordances

*Affordances* are generally defined as the types of actions an object or environment encourages. Numerous theorists have highlighted potential opportunities afforded by social media platforms, but social media are also shaped by intentional actors who vary in how much they take advantage of technologies' full range of affordances. The history of social media suggests that users can create and expand affordances that influence the evolution of these tools (e.g., Van Dijck, 2012). Therefore, the categorizations and distinctions we draw upon in this chapter represent simplifications of behaviors and digital ecologies, but are necessary for purposes of organization and clarity. For example, some scholars have noted social media's affordances for democratic participation, but par-

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