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Educator perceptions of appropriate social media practices

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EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF APPROPRIATE SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES

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Approval of Dissertation

We, the faculty supervising the work of **Amanda H. Preece**, affirm that the dissertation, *Educator Perceptions of Appropriate Social Media Practices*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the EdD Program in Leadership Studies and the College of Education and Professional Development. The work also conforms to the requirements and formatting guidelines of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family. Bill Preece, you are my person. You are my first call when I have good news. You are my greatest advocate. We have grown and survived and are now able to enjoy and appreciate the journey. Hanna and Chloe, you are the goodness and joy that everyone deserves. I am so proud of the women you are becoming. May you always know whatever you dream, you can accomplish. I love you all with my whole heart.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative pilot study was to investigate the perceptions of educators regarding appropriate social media practices. Specific elements of appropriate social media use by teachers investigated include understanding of acceptable use policies and freedom of speech, the relationship between social media and professional development, and best practices for educators concerning their social media usage. Purposeful, convenience, and snowball sampling were used to select study participants. Study participants (N=24) were preservice teachers completing student teaching or mentor teachers for Marshall University College of Education and Professional Development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 teacher candidates and 12 mentor teachers to gain their perspectives regarding appropriate social media usage by educators. Thematic analysis was used to organize and interpret the information collected. Findings suggest educators understand what are considered appropriate social media practices, including privacy settings, and professional language and communication between both students and parents. Further research suggestions include interviewing teacher candidates and mentor teachers from other states and universities, further investigating the difference in perspective of elementary and secondary teachers, and completing follow-up interviews with teacher candidates once employed.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Approximately 80% of teachers in the United States have a personal social media account. More than one-third of these teachers also use their personal social media accounts to communicate with students, colleagues, and parents (Chang, 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic that closed schools in spring 2020, the utilization of social media by teachers to communicate with parents and students increased significantly, creating new privacy, ethics, and legal concerns for administrators and school systems (Keierleber, 2020).

Today, teachers are using social media to connect with other education professionals, sharing ideas and information to assist with new aspects of teaching, including online learning. Social media platforms that appeal to educators are also used to promote business endeavors, including marketing teacher-created resources.

As the use of social media by educators grows, so has the difficulty in navigating appropriate social media usage issues. In 2022, 160 teachers were terminated or resigned due to socially charged social media posts (Natanson & Balingit, 2022). While teachers are protected by the First Amendment as it applies to public concern, this does not encompass opinions regarding social or political ideology (Davis, 2021).

As educator social media usage continues to grow, so do concerns. With little research as to what educator preparation programs and school systems deem acceptable and appropriate, pre-service and practicing educators are left with limited guidance on how to navigate both personal and professional social media accounts. While school districts often require educators to sign acceptable use policies, these rarely cover their personal social media use after school hours. These are also typically viewed as suggestions, rather than directives.

The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) outlines four key standards for ethical and responsible use of technology by professional educators in both professional and personal settings. These standards focus on using technology responsibly, ensuring student safety and well-being when using technology, maintaining confidentiality in the use of technology, and promoting the appropriate use of technology in educational settings (NASDTEC, 2015). These standards help guide educators and preservice educators in their use of technology and social media in and out of the school setting.

Problem Statement

The availability and use of social media continues to grow exponentially in our personal and professional lives. Employers struggle to develop and maintain usage policies that provide appropriate guidance and remain consistent with the advances in social media platforms. These issues have been especially challenging for employers and teachers in the P-12 educational environment. Annually, scores of teachers are terminated, resign, or are disciplined for inappropriate use of social media. Educator preparation programs have a responsibility to ensure their graduates understand and apply appropriate social media use practices. Several professional organizations, including the NASDTEC, have developed, and promulgated standards to guide responsible and ethical use of technology by educators. Currently, there is little available evidence documenting the level of preservice and in-service teacher understanding of appropriate social media practices. Therefore, using NASDTEC's Principle V: Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology, as a framework, the purpose of this study is to investigate levels of understanding relative to the appropriate use of social media practices by preservice and in-service teachers. Secondarily, the study seeks to develop a catalog of best practices for social media use by preservice and in-service teachers.

Research Questions

Specific research questions that will guide the study include:

1. To what extent do preservice and in-service educators understand the responsible use of social media/technology?

2. To what extent do preservice and in-service teacher educators understand how to ensure student safety and well-being when using social media/technology?

3. To what extent do preservice and in-service teacher educators understand how to ensure confidentiality in the use of social media/technology?

4. To what extent do preservice and in-service teacher educators understand how to promote the appropriate use of social media/technology in educational settings?

5. What are the differences based on selected demographic/attribute variables, if any, in preservice and in-service teacher education to appropriately use social media/technology in educational settings?

6. What best practices do preservice and in-service teachers recommend to ensure that social media is used responsibly and safely?

7. What are the major challenges faced by preservice and in-service teachers in using social media?

Delimitations

This population for this study is limited to preservice teachers participating in student teaching or yearlong residency at Marshall University College of Education and Professional Development during the fall 2023 semester and in-service teachers who have served as cooperating teachers for Marshall University's College of Education and Professional Development teacher education program during spring 2022, fall 2022, spring 2023, or fall 2023.

The in-service teachers interviewed are limited to nine West Virginia counties in closest geographical proximity to Marshall University's Huntington, West Virginia campus as these are included in what is known as their "placement area." These counties include Cabell, Wayne, Putnam, Kanawha, Lincoln, Mason, Logan, Mingo, and Boone.

Significance of the Study

Findings from this study explore the preparedness of both preservice and in-service teachers to navigate social media usage responsibly in and out of their classrooms as educators. The study focuses on appropriate use of technology, and how these skills are conveyed to their students. Confidentiality regarding social media will also be examined. Ensuring student safety through social media usage, both personally and professionally, will be explored. Since there is little to no research on this topic, gaining a better understanding of how both preservice and in-service educators navigate social media and technology, both professionally and personally, will allow teacher preparation programs, as well as county school systems, to develop new framework or enhance already existing procedures to ensure educators demonstrate the most current knowledge and awareness on the subject.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 provides a review of the related literature. This literature review identifies teacher protections provided by the First Amendment and examines acceptable use policies implemented by educator preparation programs and school systems. The effectiveness of helping teachers navigate social media usage is also examined. Teacher and pre-service teacher social media usage for both professional and personal accounts and how teachers navigate the "gray area" of topics that could be deemed inappropriate are also examined. Examples of classroom teachers who have been reprimanded for their social media usage are also examined, further exploring how the line between First Amendment protections and inappropriate personal social media can conflict.

Teachers, the First Amendment, and Acceptable Use Policies

Since *Pickering v. Board of Education* in 1968, the way teachers express themselves as it applies to their profession has been crucial to how they are perceived professionally. Teacher freedom of speech is currently protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution if their statements apply to public concern. However, what one person perceives as public concern could be seen as controversial and unacceptable by another. In his June 2020 article, attorney David Hudson says while school employees are protected by the First Amendment and maintain privileges to comment on matters of public importance, it is just that: a privilege. Hudson suggests when Pickering is applied to social media postings, a balance must occur. While topics such as racism and protesting would be protected by the First Amendment, language seen as racist, or offensive may not be protected and could be seen as grounds for termination (Hudson, 2020).

The Pickering test, sometimes referred to as the Pickering-Connick test, a balancing test used by courts to help determine whether a public employee's speech is warranted First Amendment protection, is rarely definitive in cases involving online speech. These types of cases involving freedom of speech, social media, and educators made their way to federal district courts as early as 2008, shortly after interest in social media began to grow (Black & Shaver, 2019).

The popular My Space platform was the first to gain attention for inappropriate use by an educator. Connecticut English teacher Jeffery Spanierman was dismissed from his position after it was found that he used the platform during non-school hours to communicate with students regarding both school-related and personal matters. Use of the Pickering rule found that Spanierman's personal My Space page content did not meet the parameters of "public interest" and his firing was upheld. In the same year, a student teacher was dismissed from her student teaching placement and was unable to complete her degree or become licensed due to a social media post (Russo et al., 2010).

Pennsylvania student teacher Stacy Snyder posted a photo of herself, wearing a pirate's hat and holding a plastic cup, with the caption "drunken pirate". She also posted disparaging comments about her cooperating teacher on her public social media platform. Following complaints by the cooperating teacher, Snyder was removed from the program and not allowed to complete. She filed a lawsuit against the university, but was found to have no standing, since her social media platform was seen as an employee posting about a private matter. However, a blog by a teacher where she listed comments she wished she could write on student report cards, including "frightfully dim", were seen as protected, stating that the teacher was addressing the work ethic of today's youth, and this was a matter of public concern (Russo et al., 2010).

Eckes and Russo (2021) also referenced the Stacy Snyder incident when discussing the understanding of freedom of speech as it involves teachers inside and outside of the classroom. She reiterates that teachers must walk a "fine line" regarding their social media usage and acceptable use policies must be adhered to by educators when the technology in use is owned by the school system. A teacher in New Jersey was dismissed after allegedly electronically transmitting nude photos of himself on his district-issued laptop and iPad.

While school systems can be entitled to qualified immunity concerning these First Amendment issues, they must also be weary of punishing employees for the expression of their opinions. This was the opinion of one of the justices of the Supreme Court of Georgia during their review of a case involving the termination of a teacher who spoke critically of the Black Lives Matter movement. While the court ruled in favor of the school system, this particular justice warned government agencies against hindering their employee's freedom of speech when the matter was not clear (*Tucker v. Atwater et al.,* 2018).

While matters of free speech regarding public concern are protected under the First Amendment, this rarely translates when teachers discuss individuals or groups of students on social media. New Jersey teacher Jennifer O'Brien claimed it was a matter of public concern when she referred to the mostly minority first-grade students in her class as "future criminals". New York teacher Christine Rubino commented that she should schedule a field trip to the beach for her 5th-grade students after the story of a student drowning on a school trip was posted to Facebook. She commented that she hated their guts, they were the devil's spawn, and she would "not throw a life jacket in for a million". She was terminated, but appealed to the New York State Supreme Court, arguing that her comments were protected by the First Amendment.

However, the court found that these comments, like O'Brien's, were not matters of public concern and instead derogatory and not reflective of an educator (O'Connor & Schmidt, 2015).

According to attorney and author Robert Kim, teachers have fewer free speech rights than their students. Kim suggests that teachers must see themselves in several roles to protect themselves from freedom of speech concerns. This includes seeing the teacher as a curriculum steward, a legal and civic role model, and a community leader. When teachers, as well as government officials, recognize teachers in these important roles, Kim believes that respect in all areas will grow, limiting freedom of speech concerns (Kim, 2023).

Crockett et al. (2023) looked closely at teacher social media usage and the legal implications that could develop and how those could potentially be navigated by the judicial system. By examining Pickering, Tinker, and other cases used when determining free speech, as well as applying these standards to already decided cases involving teachers and appropriate social media usage, a framework for assessing social media posts based on synthesis of these court cases was developed. This framework first determined whether or not the social media post was the root of the concern or simply an association. Then factors such as whether or not the post was a matter of public concern, whether the post was made using a public or private social media setting, and did the post cause a significant school disruption were considered. This flowchart allows the reader to take the information they have on a particular incident and likely determine whether the incident would be considered private speech, and if the speech would be protected or likely not protected.

While this framework provides some guidance, Crockett et al. (2023) recommends school leaders provide well-defined social media policy guidelines and communicate these to staff at all levels. As recommended by other studies (Kim, 2023; Reynard, 2013) administrators should

include educators in the development of these policies. While training and professional development should be provided to current teachers, the study also recommends conveying professional expectations to student teachers in the district, and creating specific sessions for these new, impressionable educators.

Davis (2021) looked at the growing number of teachers who are being reprimanded for their private social media posts and identified three factors teachers can use to determine whether their social media presence is protected by the First Amendment. Her work incorporates the findings from Pickering, including whether the post is considered a matter of public concern, is the teacher speaking as a citizen or employee, and how can the speech impede the effectiveness of the government agency, in this case, the school system. Davis suggests many acceptable use policies implemented by school systems are not clear, and in many cases, infringe on teacher rights. Wofsy (2020) emphasized that courts typically defer to employers in freedom of speech matters when the relationship between the employer and employee is considered a "close working" relationship. However, the Supreme Court has found that a teacher's work relationship with the superintendent or board of education would not be considered such.

While some states and local school districts have clear acceptable use policies, other entities take this to a more extreme level. In 2011, Missouri introduced a statute that would make teachers use of an Internet site to contact students illegal. This statute, passed on May 12, 2011, by the Missouri General Assembly, prohibits teachers from using websites that are non-work related to gain "exclusive access" to current or former students under the age of 18 and have not yet graduated (Akiti, 2012). The legislation, set to become effective in August 2011, was stalled by an injunction filed by the Missouri State Teachers Association. The law was then revisited and repealed, with lawmakers instead requiring public school districts to adopt a more rigid

acceptable use policy, focusing on improper communication between teachers and students. The legal director for the ACLU of Eastern Missouri, Tony Rothert, commented that the community expects teachers to meet a certain moral standard and that "reasonable teachers are going to be afraid to use Facebook or Twitter at all" (McNee, 2013).

Reynard (2013) analyzed the effectiveness of school district acceptable use policies pertaining to social networks. Reynard discovered many of the guidelines for acceptable social media usage could be considered expectations. She provided several examples. The Metropolitan Nashville Public School System provided several guidelines regarding harassing language, confidentiality, and respect in their social media policy statement, along with actions that would occur if the guidelines were not followed. While the policy provides guidance and repercussions, it is not explicit about what would be considered harassment or lack of respect in social media posts. New York City Department of Education policy states educators must understand while privacy settings may be in place, private communication published online can easily be made public. Reynard compared these two districts to a policy implemented by a high school in Australia. She notes the difference between the policies in the United States and the one in Australia is language that reflects collaboration. Reynard suggests school systems collaborate with employees to reach an understanding of what is deemed appropriate and acceptable, allowing teachers a better understanding of what is protected and what does not fall under freedom of speech.

Acceptable use policies can achieve more than one goal: they not only communicate the expectations of the user but can also state what the repercussions are for misuse. Elmbrook School District in Wisconsin has an explicit acceptable use policy, prohibiting personal communication between teachers and students using non-district applications or devices, stating

that termination or legal action can occur if violated. A similar policy in Dayton, Ohio Public

Schools focuses on professional relationships between teachers and students and prohibits

teachers from requesting students as friends on social media sites. This acceptable use policy not

only addresses the repercussions for teachers who violate the policy, but also includes students

(Akiti, 2012)

Teachers have also started using social media as a means of professional development in

more recent years. Rodesiler (2016) looked closely at self-directed professional development by

teachers and the acceptable use policies that govern their participation in his 2016 study.

Looking at policies from 30 different school districts, Rodesiler found 19 of these districts had

explicit policies regarding the acceptable use of technology and social media. Rodesiler noted

that pre-existing policies from school boards were regularly referenced. Two of the most

frequently referenced policies included using the district network for personal business and

prohibiting disclosure of student records without consent. Rodesiler also noted the acceptable use

policies that were represented with the most clarity were those that established specific

guidelines for teacher use of social media when contacting students. These policies focused on

the communication's purpose, professionalism, and transparency.

Personal and Professional Social Media Usage in Education

Countries around the world view social media usage and educators differently. In Israel,

where the Ministry of Education issued a national ban on teacher-student communication

through any Social Network Site (SNS), teachers chose to ignore this ban in favor of reaching

their students. Asterhan and Rosenberg (2015) conducted a 2015 study of 178 Israeli secondary

school teachers and found 70% of these teachers had active Facebook accounts, and 59%

reported using this account to communicate with students at least once a week. While directly

"friending" one another and chatting was deemed most controversial by participants, others created a "fan" page and felt it was the more appropriate option. While this digital communication is seen as positive in Israel, it is not seen as favorable in Spain. A study by Bordalba and Bochaca (2019) focused on families in 11 schools in Spain. Study findings suggested parents were more likely to and would rather get information from the teacher face to face, or from a written note in their child's daily agenda, than on a social media platform.

A study of 204 preservice teachers in Cyprus (Tezer et al., 2017) found that students who used social media in a positive way to share professional ideas, including teaching videos and lesson plans, also had a positive attitude toward social media overall. This study not only compared students' professional use of social media, but also their personal use, their grade point averages, and their most used forms of social media. Study findings indicated that when used appropriately, social media can have a positive impact on the academic achievement of preservice teachers.

Carpenter et al. (2023) looked closely at one institution's preservice teacher education program and its efforts to develop and support professional learning networks (PLN). Elon University, located in North Carolina, used Twitter and the unique hashtag #ElonEd to promote their teacher education program, using this hashtag when students asked questions about the teacher education program, when posts were made about courses, and any other tweets that involved Elon's education preparation program. Alumni and other Twitter-using educators who were not affiliated with Elon also began using the hashtag. Through this study, over 49,000 tweets over six years using the #ElonEd hashtag were analyzed. Study findings indicate the use of the hashtag offered students a larger group of professional colleagues with which to interact

outside of their cohort. Doing so created professional contacts and relationships helpful in securing employment.

Digitally native preservice teachers are comfortable implementing social media into their daily teaching routines. In a 2016 study of preservice teachers, Szeto et al. found that 24 of 33 preservice teachers surveyed answered they "always" or "often" use social media in their daily instruction. The most used form of social media was YouTube or a combination of YouTube and another social media site. While most of these preservice teachers used social media in a direct pedagogy form, others implored themselves to "step out of the box" and take on a more exploratory role, using social media in a constructivist or participatory form. Preservice teachers who explored these ideas used social media to upload their own lessons to the YouTube platform or videoed the students working on a lesson and uploaded those for student/parent view. Both strategies received positive feedback from both students, parents, and colleagues.

To better control their social media presence, many teachers have chosen to create separate personal and professional social media presences. While many teachers create this dual internet existence strictly for privacy purposes, others have chosen to do so as a means of connecting with other teachers and using their platform for professional development. During the pandemic, Danielle Mancinelli, a teacher and contributor to Edutopia, found herself struggling with the new expectations of online instruction. Since she was unable to connect with teachers in her own school building, she sought out teacher groups via Facebook and Twitter for advice and support (Mancinelli, 2020).

Just as Mancinelli looked for support during the pandemic, other educators used social media for similar purposes. In a study focusing on teacher social media use prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, Aguilar et al. (2021), found teachers interviewed for the study focused

their social media usage on two intents: finding and learning. While they did use social media as a tool for connecting and sharing, the focus of their usage emphasized understanding how to use social media for instruction and finding resources and activities to share with their students.

Torphy et al. (2020) highlighted the use of social media by teachers to locate resources and improve their lessons. According to Amazon Education, educators spend up to twelve hours per week outside of the school day in search of resources and materials online. Many teachers use sites such as Pinterest or Teachers Pay Teachers for mathematics and language arts supplemental sources and materials. By using these sites, teachers can see photos of ways to use the materials and archive them in their search history. Torphy suggests using social media as a resource saves teachers the social stigma of asking others in person for help, allowing them to instead search for the answers in private.

Hashim and Carpenter (2019) suggest teachers are also using social media platforms, especially Twitter (now known as X), to reach peers in various corners of the teaching world for advice and feedback. The use of hashtags to connect with other educators is one way teachers are using social media as a professional learning tool. As schools are adding to their programs and curriculum, teachers are expected to take on new roles with little to no background knowledge, including teaching Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. To assist in preparing for these courses, teachers are using hashtags such as "#apbiochat" to make connections via Twitter with other teachers who utilize the same curriculum. Doing so, Hashim and Carpenter suggest, allows them to ask questions, share teaching ideas, and advance their overall instructional practice (Hashim & Carpenter, 2019).

Professional learning for educators has transitioned in recent years to self-paced, online learning communities. Prestridge (2018) investigated how educators are using online learning

platforms to share knowledge, create discussions, and create community. Flexibility and accessibility made the online learning platform more appealing to many educators. Through the similarities of the individuals as well as the information they are seeking, online learning groups emerge to create reflective, collaborative educators.

Greenhow et al. (2020) looked at the role of social media in both teaching and teaching learning over the past decade. They found that formal professional development was not prevalent, but teachers were more likely to use social media in this capacity due to the flexibility. Greenhow et al. stated that the informal and self-directed nature of this type of professional development allowed teachers to find inspiration in topics that interested them, rather than the cookie-cutter versions that many districts provided. Again, the theme of community was also important. Teachers used this platform to find others with similar interests in the classroom or to find support from those with similar classroom experiences. Teachers in the study also noted the collaboration with other teachers online gave them confidence in their own teaching and allowed them to try ideas, like "flipped" classrooms or more hands-on approaches to their teaching they may not have previously felt secure enough to engage in.

While the pandemic amplified the use of social media communication with parents, many school districts and teachers have been using social media for online announcements. While many see social media as a connection tool, schools often see platforms such as Twitter as a means of making announcements and providing information without engagement between users. By creating unidirectional rather than two-way engagement, schools and teachers can provide information to parents without comment or discussion (Michela et al., 2022). The use of social media platforms to connect parents, schools, and teachers experienced a significant increase during and post-pandemic. According to a 2021 study of over 13,000 school and classroom

Facebook pages, engagement increased from approximately 250,000 items of engagement in March and April 2018, to nearly 500,000 items of engagement in March and April 2020 (Kimmons et al., 2021).

The implementation of a professional social media presence for teachers has numerous benefits. One benefit of separating the personal and professional presence is the anonymity of a teacher's personal life. In a 2016 survey by Chang, nearly one-third of the 1,000 teachers responding reported they had experienced problems with parents or students connecting with them on social media. More than 75% of the respondents stated they felt parents used social media connections to investigate their private lives.

Other teachers have used a professional social media presence to supplement their income (Shelton et al., 2020). The term "edu-influencer" has gained recent popularity when referring to teachers who use social media platforms to promote educational products, both self-created and sponsored. Social media teacher collaboratives like Teach Your Heart Out and Get Your Teach On offer educators a combined platform to endorse products and supplies. These platforms also offer a space to share philosophies and practices, all while earning additional income. By linking their social media sites to teacher resource sites like Teachers Pay Teachers, educators are engaging social media followers. Through this engagement, they provide self-created lessons and instructional strategies, while supplementing their incomes.

One teacher, Georgia kindergarten teacher Deanna Jump, was Teachers Pay Teachers' first "millionaire teacher" in 2016 (Gerencer, 2015). Through the sales of her self-created plans on the site, and promoted through her Instagram platform, @msdeannajump, as well as her participation as a facilitator with the Get Your Teach On group, Jump has seen her lesson plans used in classrooms as far away as Spain, all the while earning additional income.

Carpenter et al. (2020) looked at teachers' use of social media, especially Instagram, and identified benefits, as well as challenges of teacher social media usage. The use of social media for professional development was listed as a positive, allowing teachers to make connections with those in a professional space when they may never have had the opportunity to do so through typical professional development opportunities. Carpenter et al. suggest social media can facilitate connections and help educators build relationships with others who have common ideas and interests, instead of forcing educators to only professionally interact with others who share the same school, county, or central office.

While there are clear advantages of social media usage for professional development for teachers, Carpenter et al. (2020) also notes some challenges. Content, including the amount available, as well as the accuracy of this content, is an obvious challenge for teachers to navigate when seeking out professional connections on social media. Another challenge is choosing sources that create a positive atmosphere, promoting polite discussion rather than controversial or conflict-filled platforms. Lastly, Carpenter et al. describe "context collapse" as a challenge when using sites like Instagram to connect with other teachers. In person, messages can be tweaked to fit the social context of the conversation. However, when presented on a platform like Instagram, the educator must remember that the message can potentially be seen by anyone.

Topics important to educators who use social media have also become a more recent focus. Kimmons et al. (2021) studied educators who are using Twitter to connect with other educators using common hashtags. Researchers tracked educator hashtags, as well as hyperlinked education domains associated with #EdTech conversations on Twitter. Using a dataset of over 130,000 original tweets, the most common hashtags included #remotelearning, #onlinelearning, and #distancelearning. The repeated use of these hashtags indicates that

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educators are continuing to use social media outlets to connect regarding online learning following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teacher influencers are not only using their social media presence to share lesson planning ideas or classroom management tips. Davis and Yi (2022) looked at how these educational influencers are using their Instagram accounts for personal and ideological purposes. Davis and Yi followed ten PK-6 teacher influencers with at least 50,000 followers. The group consisted of both male and female teachers of varying ethnicity, age demographics, geographical area, and years of experience. They found that while teacher influencers did share items that they were being paid to promote, including clothing, makeup, and classroom supplies, they also shared photos and videos that allowed them to connect with their followers on a personal level. These included photos of their children and spouses or other family members, celebrations of holidays, and daily moments of their lives. They also used their accounts to express ideas and views on social justice issues, such as race, immigration, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Social Media Guidelines and Standards for Educators

While many school systems implement acceptable use policies for teachers, these often do not encompass social media usage outside of the school day. As part of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) implemented by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, teachers are expected to use social media "responsibly, transparently, and primarily for the purposes of teaching and learning per school and district policy" (2015). Principle V: Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology focuses on the educator's boundaries when using social media.

The most recent acceptable use policy put forth by the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE, 2018) states that educators, service personnel, and staff are responsible for

maintaining appropriate boundaries between personal social networking and

professional/educational networking to safeguard professional integrity. It also outlines the

importance of maintaining professional, ethical relationships with students, both in and out of the

classroom, and while using social media or any form of electronic communication.

While some educator preparation programs have implemented social media guidelines

and standards for preservice teachers, the understanding of the guidelines and the implications of

not adhering to them is still problematic for future teachers, as well as the lack of a consistent,

preservice educator policy. Preservice teachers, their profile pictures, and social media posts,

were the subject of a 2020 study by Marlynn Griffin and Cordelia Zinski for the Australian

Journal of Teacher Education. The researchers focused their study on 515 preservice teachers,

looking at their images posted on social media sites, as well as the likelihood of posting

problematic content and their preference for others viewing their social media sites. The study

found that while many of the preservice teachers reported they used social media responsibly,

several participants stated they could see where their profile pictures might be viewed as

inappropriate and had concerns about their personal social media accounts being viewed by

supervisors, employers, or university faculty. Photos that included alcohol or some expressions

of nudity were deemed the most problematic by the group. The study also concluded preservice

teachers may not fully grasp that their social media content could negatively impact their careers

and future (Griffin & Zinski, 2020).

"Gray Area": Teachers Who Have Been Reprimanded for Personal Social Media Usage

While most school systems have policies in place regarding technology or social media,

the lack of specific guidelines can confuse teachers. Such policies can cause confusion if not

explicit, often leading to reprimands and in some cases, termination. In a 2016 study by Warnick

et al., that explored teacher social media use and teacher ethics, four concepts were identified as being integral in creating a social media policy for educators. These concepts include statements that reflect poorly on professional judgment, including racially, politically, or religiously charged statements. A second item included illegal or reckless behavior, such as drug use. The third item involved unwelcome attention to students via social media, such as friend requesting a student, or engaging in personal communication outside of the school day. The fourth concept is where the "gray area" for teachers falls, as it includes legal, yet sometimes controversial, behavior. This may include drinking alcohol, using foul language, or dressing provocatively.

In 2018, North Carolina teacher Kandice Mason was suspended from her sixth-grade teaching position for posting photos of herself participating in pole dancing lessons after school hours (Horton, 2021). The county school system charged Mason with violating the district's social media policy, which states teachers are responsible for public conduct outside school hours and prohibits posting indecent photos or graphics. Mason said she did not believe her social media presence violated the policy because she did not see her participation as a pole dancing instructor, which she sees as both exercise and art, as obscene.

A middle school teacher in Florida was recently terminated due to TikTok videos deemed inappropriate by the county school system. Todd Erdman, a 45-year-old English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, was fired after TikTok videos he claimed were private, were leaked to his public account and viewed by students and parents. In the videos, Erdman can be seen drinking alcohol, making rude and disparaging remarks about students and fellow teachers, and taking a candle-lit bath. Before his termination, Erdman had positive evaluations and no prior discipline issues (Postal, 2021).

The public TikTok videos of a Kansas middle school teacher and aspiring comedian resulted in his termination. Stephen Taylor gained a viral following for his TikTok videos discussing pranks he would pull on his middle school students, including telling them wrong information and breaking wind in their presence. Taylor's videos were brought to the attention of his administration, who claimed they were offensive, and he was told to take them down and review the district's social media policy. When he refused to remove the videos (which do not show Taylor's students, but did show his classroom), he was terminated. Taylor stated that the social media policies of the district were "designed for MySpace" and years behind where the world currently stands concerning social media. Taylor claims that these videos were simply part of his comedy routine and do not reflect his actions or attitude in the classroom. Addressing the school district, Taylor said "The reason I'm doing comedy on TikTok is to make money because you only pay me $45,000 a year and I work all the time." Taylor did not appeal his termination and instead signed with an agent and booked 30 stand-up comedy appearances (Diaz, 2023).

Another Texas teacher was recently terminated due to a TikTok video she posted following a meeting with her administrator. Sophia DeLoretto-Chudy was terminated by the Austin Independent School District after a TikTok video she posted went viral. The video highlighted items that DeLoretto-Chudy's principal noted in a meeting she had with her regarding her classroom performance. One of the items of concern was that DeLoretto-Chudy was teaching her students about their rights as United States citizens. The district claims DeLoretto-Chudy was not fired for the video, but that she violated the district's social media policy, which states an employee's use of electronic communication cannot interfere with their ability to perform their duties. DeLoretto-Chudy is appealing her termination (Rivera, 2023).

In 2019, New York teacher Lauren Miranda was terminated after a topless selfie she sent to a colleague she was dating was leaked to students. In her initial termination meeting, Miranda and the group of mostly male administrators were shown the photo on a computer screen. Miranda has since filed a federal lawsuit against the school board, stating her termination had more to do with gender bias than with the photo, which was obtained by students without her consent or knowledge. Miranda's lawsuit states that if a similar instance had occurred with a male teacher, he would not have been terminated (Dorrian, 2022; Gold 2019).

At times, it is not necessarily what educators post to social media, but instead what they say in private that is then posted to public social media sites that can be deemed as problematic, or in many cases, grounds for termination. Two Houston area educators were terminated after text messages and remarks they made about students were posted to social media. A special needs teacher composed a text message, including profanity and complaints regarding an autistic student, and accidentally sent the text message to the child's mother instead of a colleague, as she had originally intended. An administrator at another Houston area school was overheard making a derogatory and false statement regarding a special needs student at her school, stating that if the child ran away from staff again, she would call the police and say that he had a gun. After this comment was made in front of three other staff members, it made its way to a Facebook post that was then shared on the school community's Facebook page. While both took responsibility for their statements and actions, both were ultimately fired (Alfonso, 2018).

Mississippi teacher Cammie Rone was terminated by her school district following the report of racist posts made to her personal Facebook account by parents (Cerullo, 2018). Rone, however, argued that she never made the post and that her account must have been compromised. While there was no indication that she had ever posted anything political, and

several character witnesses testified on her behalf, she could not prove that her account had been hacked and was fired. She appealed the termination and was eventually reinstated, receiving lost wages, by the Mississippi State Court of Appeals (*South Panola School District v. Cammie Rone*, 2019).

In August 2023, an art teacher hired in suburban Chicago was later terminated due to posts on their personal social media account. The teacher, Kristopher Martin, was hired by Homer Community Consolidated District as an elementary art teacher during the summer of 2023. However, once posts from his personal social media page were discovered by parents and brought to the attention of the school board, he was immediately terminated (FOX, 2023). The school system apologized they did not complete "due diligence" before hiring Martin, with parents claiming his social media posts contained satanic violence. Martin, however, claims he was targeted for his sexual orientation by a hate group on TikTok (Hart, 2023). GoFundMe accounts have been set up to help cover his living expenses while he appeals the termination.

Teachers who are employed by private religious school districts have differing expectations than those teachers employed by state and local districts and are not necessarily protected due to views on LGBTQ+ rights or sexual orientation. Kristi Maris, a teacher at First Baptist Academy in Baytown, Texas, was fired after posting a photo of herself and another teacher (who was also terminated) at a drag show performance at a local restaurant. While she was not given a clear reason as to why she was fired, she was directed to the photo and told she was not "walking in a godly manner". Maris taught at the school for 20 years before this incident (Alfonseca, 2023).

Michael Califano was fired by Maria Regina School in Seaford, New York in December 2023, after he posted a photo on his personal social media showing him kissing his boyfriend.

Even though his platform was private, the photo was sent to his administrators from an outside source. The diocese told him he violated guidelines about living a Catholic lifestyle and the "nature of the pictures were concerning". The day after his termination, over 100 parents, students, and relatives of Califano protested outside the school with signs saying "God loves Mr. Califano and so do we" as well as other statements supporting Califano's personal life. A video posted by a parent calls Califano a "pillar of the community". The office of the diocese claims that the school did not end Califano's employment due to his sexuality. (Goldberg, 2023).

This gray area not only exists for teachers, but also for elected school board members. On October 31, 2023, the United States Supreme Court heard arguments regarding whether or not constituents can be blocked from social media posts by elected school board officials. Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff and T.J. Zane were elected to the Poway Unified School District Board of Education near San Diego, California in 2014. Both elected officials transitioned their campaign pages on Facebook and Twitter to informative pages about the school district where they identified themselves as board members. Parents Christopher and Kimberly Garnier posted several comments to both board members pages, expressing concerns about financial mismanagement and bullying. O'Connor-Ratcliff and Zane blocked both Mr. and Ms. Garnier from their public pages after excessive comments were posted. The Garniers sued both board members (Walsh, 2023). A decision has not yet been made on the matter.

While many teachers are being terminated for questionable behavior on social media, one teacher was recently reinstated following a hearing before the Illinois Supreme Court. Dierdre Kelleher was terminated by Oak Park Elementary School following a series of problematic Facebook posts on her personal page, which had privacy settings engaged. Each of the Facebook posts in question discussed her teaching career and issues with students and parents. While the

posts did not name anyone directly, they were unfavorable. After her termination, Kelleher sued the school system, appealing to the Illinois Supreme Court. The Court found that while Kelleher was reprimanded for several acts of what the school considered misconduct, the school did not follow proper procedure when terminating her. She was given no written notice, and she did not receive proper notice of a hearing. Her posts did not disrupt the education or the daily function of the school. According to the Court, while Kelleher's behavior was concerning, it was not cause for dismissal (*Kelleher v. Illinois State Board of Education and Board of Education of Oak Park Elementary School District No. 97*, 2023).

Summary

Understanding First Amendment protection as well as the expectations of acceptable use policies can be challenging for educators concerning personal social media. While teacher freedom of speech is protected when discussing matters of public concern, other posts may not fall under this safeguard. The Pickering test is used by courts to determine if speech is warranted First Amendment protection. Acceptable use policies, designed and enforced by school systems, guide teachers regarding their technology and social media use. However, these policies and their expectations are not always well-defined, creating confusion for teachers.

Social media has recently become an important piece of teacher professional development. Since the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, more teachers and teacher education programs are using social media to connect with other educators and share ideas. Using hashtags for common themes, finding resources, and seeking out new materials online are just a few ways that teachers use social media to improve their planning and instruction.

Educators are creating separate social media profiles, focusing on their profession. These separate social media profiles are used to share teaching philosophies, instructional strategies,

and resources. Some teachers are also using these professional profiles to market, promote, and sell their own teaching materials or other teacher-related products.

While acceptable use policies are safeguards for teachers and students during the school day, they rarely cover the use of personal social media outside of the school day. The Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE), implemented by the NASDTEC maintains teachers are expected to use social media "responsibly, transparently, and primarily for the purposes of teaching and learning per school and district policy" (NASDTEC, 2015). Principal v: Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology, concentrates on educator's boundaries when using social media. Some states and educator preparation programs have clear guidelines regarding teacher social media usage, while others are seen as recommendations.

The "gray area" of teacher social media usage occurs when teachers do not have clear social media guidelines. Warnick et al. (2016) studied policies regarding technology and social media. Four concepts were identified as most important when creating a social media policy for educators. Concepts included illegal and reckless behavior, communication with students outside of the school day, making statements that reflect poorly on personal judgment, and legal, yet controversial, behavior. Cases involving preservice and in-service teachers who have experienced scrutiny, legal action, or termination for behavior that falls under this umbrella were examined.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Chapter 3 describes the research methods used to conduct this study. This chapter is organized into sections describing the research design, population and sample, development and validation of the interview protocol, data collection, data analysis, and limitations.

Research Design

This study examined preservice and in-service teachers understanding of appropriate social media practices inside and outside of the classroom. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design. Phenomenological research focuses on inquiry that stems from the lived experiences of individuals who have all experienced a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This design involves conducting interviews with those participants to reflect these common shared experiences. A phenomenological design is the best choice for this study because it allows the researcher to identify common themes within the population and sample of both preservice and practicing educators.

Population and Sample

Preservice teacher participants were selected from the teacher education program of Marshall University College of Education and Professional Development. These teacher candidates were enrolled in the spring 2023 and fall 2023 semesters in their respective programs, participating in extended field experiences. Initial contact was made at the orientation sessions for these students before participating in their field experiences through a recruitment letter (Appendix B). From this initial contact, a sample of twelve preservice teachers were selected to participate in a semi-structured interview. These students were selected based on their content area. Half of those selected were elementary preservice teacher candidates and the other half were secondary or related arts preservice teacher candidates. For this research, the goal was to

have at least five different counties represented in both the in-service and preservice teacher groups.

Inservice teacher participants were chosen from the pool of recent cooperating teachers at the College of Education and Professional Development at Marshall University. These in-service teachers must have mentored a teacher candidate within the past two years. These teachers were identified through a cooperating teacher listserv used by the College of Education and Professional Development. Teachers on this listserv were sent a recruitment letter (Appendix B). and the list of those interviewees were compiled from those who responded. The goal was to have at least twelve in-service teachers (six elementary, six secondary) participate.

Development of the Interview Protocol

Interviews are necessary when we cannot observe behavior or reactions, or when we want to know how the subjects in question felt about an incident that occurred in the past. Interviews have been referred to as a "conversation with purpose" (Dexter, 1970). Using a semi-structured interview method allowed the researcher flexibility but provided a guide to the questions and topics the interview covered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The utilization of this format allowed for more probing interactions that may otherwise be overlooked.

These interview protocols, *Interview Protocol*, Educator Perceptions of Appropriate Social Media Practices (Appendix C), were guided by and developed from Principle V: Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology from the Model Code of Ethics for Teachers developed by NASDTEC. The themes found in these five principles are the foundation for the research questions. To validate the protocol, the researcher conducted a pilot study with one current student and one current teacher to ensure the questions were understandable, open-ended, and not leading, and that enough information was gathered.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to gain a better understanding of preservice and in-service educator preparedness of social media and technology usage. These interviews were conducted using an already established set of questions (see Appendix C) with the expectation that, when appropriate, follow-up questions may be used for clarification or to gain more information.

Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes and was conducted via video conferencing (Zoom, Teams) for convenience purposes. All interviews were recorded, with the consent of the participant, and were transcribed following the interview. Field notes were also taken during the interview.

Data Analysis

According to Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules, there are several advantages to using thematic analysis when analyzing qualitative data sets. Thematic analysis can help researchers identify similarities and differences in the perspectives of participants and provide unanticipated insight. This type of data analysis also allows researchers to large amounts of information into easy-to-understand reporting (2017).

Following the interviews, either the transcription or field notes, depending upon the level of consent, were returned to the participant for member checking to ensure that the data was accurate. Data analysis began by identifying and tentatively defining recurring themes throughout the responses. These themes continued to organically present themselves until all important topics were coded.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are generally those that are found in qualitative research. The research could be influenced by several factors, including the quality of the researcher's skills, as well as the researcher's personal biases. The co-investigator acting as the interviewer could also affect the quality of the responses. Those who are participating may not be as forthcoming with their answers due to this factor, especially if the subject matter is sensitive or if the participant feels that their behavior demonstrated by a response may be viewed with a negative connotation. The final limitation is the small sample size selected from one educator preparation program in West Virginia.

Chapter 4: Study Findings

This chapter provides study findings and is organized into sections related to data collection, characteristics of participants, and the major findings. The presentation of the major findings is organized around each of the research questions. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Data Collection

Twenty-four interviews were conducted for this study. The study sample consists of twelve students in their final semesters in the College of Education and Professional Development (COEPD) at Marshall University and twelve licensed teachers, who have served or are currently serving as mentor teachers for COEPD teacher candidates.

Participants were contacted via email using MU COEPD list servs. All students enrolled in student teaching or yearlong residency during spring 2023 or fall 2023 were contacted via email. All teachers who have mentored students during the spring 2022, fall 2022, spring 2023 or fall 2023 semesters were also contacted. Emails sent to possible participants included the letter of intent, the study abstract, and consent. As members of each group responded, their names were added to a master list of potential interviewees. Interviewees were then sent an email requesting them to participate in a semi-structured interview conducted via Teams. Those who responded to this request were interviewed. Interviews were typically scheduled within one week of the response. Interviewees represented fourteen individual schools located in four West Virginia school districts.

Snowball sampling was also implemented in an effort to expand the sample. Interviewees were asked to recommend any other mentor teachers or teacher candidates that should be interviewed. This process led to one additional teacher interview.

The interview process began on August 11, 2023, and ended on October 5, 2023. Interviews took approximately 45 minutes to complete. All 24 interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams Videoconferencing Platform. The Microsoft Teams Videoconferencing Platform provided both video and audio recordings, as well as interview transcripts. All participants agreed on both recording and transcription. Written field notes were taken during each interview. Member checking was conducted following each interview; transcripts of interviews and field notes were sent to interviewees for review.

Characteristics of Participants

Twelve (50%) of the 24 participants were currently enrolled students in Marshall University's College of Education and Professional Development. Of the 12 teacher candidates, three (25%) participants were completing their final semester of their elementary yearlong residency. Three (25%) participants were completing traditional semester long student teaching placements, two in social studies education and one in music education. Two (16.6%) participants were in their first semester of a yearlong residency, one in ELA education and the other in social studies education. The final four (33.3%) students were completing their student teaching on the job as a Certified Teacher of Record (CTR), a program developed by the West Virginia Department of Education. Students in a CTR position are hired in an unfilled content specific position and are paid a percentage of the starting teacher salary during their student teaching semester.

The remaining twelve participants (50%) were all mentor teachers or had served as mentor teachers to COEPD students within the past two years. Interviewees included three (25%) elementary classroom teachers, one (8.3%) elementary art teacher, one (8.3%) elementary special education teacher, four (33.3%) middle school social studies teachers, one (8.3%) high school ELA teacher, one (8.3%) high school choir and drama teacher, and one (8.3%) high school social studies teacher.

Of the mentor teacher group, six (50%) identified as female and six (50%) as male. Ten (83.3%) of the mentor teachers interviewed identified as white or Caucasian, one (8.3%) teacher identified as black or African American, and one (8.3%) identified as mixed race. Two (16.6%) participants were 21-29 years of age, eight (66.6%) participants were 30-39 years of age, and the remaining two (16.6%) participants were 40-59 years of age.

Nine (75%) teacher candidates identified as female and three (25%) identified as male. One student (8.3%) identified as black or African American, while the remaining 11 students (91.6%) identified as white or Caucasian. All 12 (100%) teacher candidates interviewed were in the 21-29 age bracket.

Mentor teachers reported fulfilling several additional roles outside of their classroom teaching responsibilities. Four (33.3%) teachers served as president of their school's faculty senate. Four (33.3%) mentor teachers were members of their respective school's leadership team, and two (16.6%) were members of the school hiring committee. Other roles mentioned included serving as a master teacher at the county level, coaching cross country and basketball, and sponsoring student council and honor society. Two (16.6%) teachers reported they had no additional roles within their school.

Teacher candidates interviewed also identified several college-related roles and responsibilities that were not part of their field experience requirements. One student served as a social media ambassador for Marshall University and another as a social media facilitator for the university's Campus Activities Board. Two students served in leadership roles in their respective fraternities and sororities. One student was a Resident Advisor for a campus dorm.

The number of years mentor teachers have been teaching ranged from 3 to 28. Eight (66.6%) mentor teachers interviewed had taught only at their respective schools, while the remaining four (33.3%) had taught at more than one school. One teacher who had taught at only one school is a looping teacher. Looping teachers teach third grade, and the following year teach the same group of students in fourth grade, then returns to third grade to begin the process again.

Major Findings

Major interview findings are presented in the following section. This section is organized around the seven research questions that guided the study. Each section addresses the responses of mentor teachers, teacher candidates, and how those responses compare.

Using Technology in a Responsible Manner

Research Question One focused on the responsible use of technology by both teacher candidates and mentor teachers inside and outside of the classroom. This focus included use of personal and professional social media and understanding of social media and acceptable use policies for their school and school system for mentor teachers, and the university for teacher candidates. This question also addressed their use of technology in the classroom and how they stayed abreast of current technology and social media trends.

All 12 teacher candidates interviewed felt they use social media responsibly. Students stated that per the MU COEPD social media policy, they were encouraged to make all social

media platforms private. All 12 students confirmed their personal social media accounts are set to private. They also stated they do not accept student or parent friend requests, per MU COEPD social media policy. A student who is currently completing Residency 1 placement in a middle school setting noted, "I do everything that I have to do in order to protect myself, but also to balance that role between preservice teacher and student." Some students had been provided copies of their district's policies on social media use and communication.

Mentor teachers also felt they understood their district's policy on social media and felt they used their personal and professional accounts responsibly. However, many were unsure or unclear of specific guidelines or expectations of the policy. Only one of the twelve teachers interviewed had their own professional social media account. This account focused on West Virginia history facts for teachers and students, as well as showcased student work with no identifiable traits. Another mentor teacher who is a club sponsor had a Facebook and Instagram page dedicated to the school's club. Posts made on this page showcased club activities. A third teacher is a coach who a has Facebook page for their school-sponsored sports. The pages are private, and parents must request to join. The membership of the page is evaluated annually and students who no longer participate are removed from the page.

Two teachers indicated they are administrators on their respective school's Facebook page and use that platform to send out information to the school's student and parent population. Both stated they are not the sole administrators of the pages, and oversight is provided by other teachers and school administrators.

When discussing trends in school technology, teacher candidates are more likely to use social media to stay abreast of current trends in school technology, while mentor teachers are more likely to receive information from county and school-level technology specialists. Ten of

the teacher candidates interviewed reported they use platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook to connect with other teachers and learn about new ways to use technology in their classrooms. One student noted TikTok's algorithms are set so that once you watch multiple teacher videos, those types of videos fill your feed:

It's just teachers all over not even just the country, but the world that share little tidbits, share things that they've found, and they do. They even oftentimes will include links for sites and stuff on there where you can go to those links to check out the things that they're sharing.

Another student, currently serving in a paid student teaching position in an elementary school, reported belonging to various Facebook groups that are in direct correlation to the grade level and subject taught. The student gathers information and ideas from these platforms, but also shares ideas and student work samples there.

Two mentor teachers indicated their schools were considered Apple Schools, and one of these teachers is a trained Apple Educator. Through the Apple Education program, teachers receive frequent training and information on how to use Apple products to enhance their teaching and student engagement. Six teachers reported they use social media platforms to stay on top of current educational technology trends. Four mentor teachers indicated they received all information and training through county-facilitated sessions, typically held on teacher professional development days. One teacher, however, referenced students and what is being taught in the classroom to stay informed on current trends:

Actually, in my honors class right now, the first part of our unit, we analyzed an argument and we looked at different articles or writings about how we use technology in our world and how it has affected us. My honors students are getting ready to write their

first analysis essay about how in terms of technology, sort of changing how we converse and connect. And so, it's really interesting because that kind of sets the tone for me, kind of knowing what's going on in the technology world from their point of view. And so, we'll talk about what is kind of trendy right now, what are you seeing on the internet, how are you using social media. And so, my kids really kind of help me know what's going on. I also like to try different things, and sometimes I'll be the guinea pig, and if it works for one class, great, and if it doesn't, let's try something else.

When asked about their familiarity with district policies on technology and communication, all mentor teachers felt they understood the policies. Because students at MU COEPD are expected to follow the college's social media policy, communicating with students and parents on social media is prohibited. Eight students responded they did not use any form of technology to communicate with students or parents outside of the regular school day. Four students employed in CTR positions reported using their county's approved platforms when communicating with students and teachers. All four CTR students have West Virginia Department of Education-issued email addresses and use them for all correspondence with parents and students. One student felt doing so kept the fact that they are both a student and a teacher separate. Students considered on the job reported they also used platforms such as Remind, Schoology and Classroom Dojo as a means of communicating with parents and students. Mentor teachers also reported using these same platforms.

Mentor teachers viewed their communication with parents and students somewhat differently. Six of the mentor teachers interviewed indicated the only way they communicate with parents or students is through a school-sponsored platform, like Schoology, or their WVDE-issued email address. They all stated that parents had attempted to communicate with them via

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social media platforms like Facebook Messenger and Instagram, but they did not acknowledge or respond to these messages. The remaining six teachers reported they did allow parents to message them on social media platforms or via text message, but boundaries had to be imposed. One teacher responded:

> I've had parents message me on Facebook and ask me to call them at like 9:30 p.m. Sometimes I just don't respond or if I know them personally, I might say that I'll call them in the morning or when I'm on planning or something like that because you have to have boundaries.

Another teacher, a club sponsor, mentioned that when traveling out of town with students for different events, students and parents are provided a cell phone number, and sending and responding to text messages is acceptable. Doing so was justified as a safety issue, and being able to reach these parties immediately was necessary.

Several students reported having separate social media accounts. These separate social media accounts are not focused on their educational roles.

Four of the twelve mentor teachers interviewed had some type of professional social media. However, only one of those separate accounts was used for educational purposes. This account shares West Virginia history facts and lessons and is a public account found on both TikTok and Instagram platforms. Another teacher reported using a separate public account to share essays and poetry, as well as information on various social issues. This private page is used for close friends and family only and does not share personal photos. The remaining two teachers who have separate accounts use those for professional endeavors outside of school.

In summary, both teacher candidates and mentor teachers reported they understood and accepted the expectations of their school and county's social media policies. All teacher

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candidates and mentor teachers interviewed maintain privacy settings on their social media platforms. While some mentor teachers allowed parents to contact them on personal platforms like Facebook Messenger, boundaries were maintained. Teacher candidates used social media platforms like TikTok to stay abreast of current trends and information about technology use in the classroom. Some mentor teachers used social media, while others were formerly trained by technology companies such as Apple to use the newest and most innovative classroom technology. Several mentor teachers depended on the training provided by their respective counties and schools to ensure they were using technology effectively in their classrooms. Both teacher candidates and mentor teachers who engaged with social media accounts other than their private accounts felt they were responsible for what they posted or shared to their public accounts. For students, these accounts which focus on campus student organizations, should reflect campus life but not in a way that would be detrimental to anyone featured. For mentor teachers, these public accounts are used to share information. These teachers were also clear in that they did not post anything that could be detrimental to their careers or viewed unfavorably.

Ensuring Student Safety When Using Technology

Research Question Two focused on student safety while using technology in the classroom. This question concentrated on how observant teacher candidates and mentor teachers are when identifying and addressing inappropriate or illegal materials, as well as cyberbullying. This question also addressed student privacy regarding their personal social media accounts and whether teachers respected this privacy.

The experiences of teacher candidates were different from those of their mentor teachers. One teacher candidate had experienced an incident regarding inappropriate and illegal materials on a student-issued technology device. This teacher candidate, who is serving a middle school,

identified a female student in her class using an app called "Wizz", which describes itself as "the ultimate online platform for random chats with people from all over the world" (Wizz, 2023). After identifying the app on one student's device, this teacher the app on four other student devices. The student initially identified was using the platform to chat with a much older male. Four other teacher candidates reported witnessing students using what was deemed "inappropriate" materials on their school-issued devices, but those incidents consisted of using gaming sites like Roblox and YouTube, and a first grader who had taken multiple selfies on a school iPad. The remaining teacher candidates had not been subject to any type of report such as this, but felt they understood what was appropriate and inappropriate and would quickly report such matters if necessary.

One teacher candidate described the challenge in the following manner: "They're all minors. There's no excuse. At any point you find something out like that, it has to be addressed immediately." One teacher candidate reported after observing students accessing sites unapproved notifying the mentor teacher. Teacher candidates mentioned the usefulness of the Apple classroom allowing teachers to monitor all student devices at one time to ensure students are on the appropriate sites and completing work promptly.

Mentor teachers described varying experiences regarding identifying and reporting illegal and inappropriate materials in electronic and other forms. One elementary teacher indicated they had identified and reported illegal and inappropriate materials on student devices. This teacher described a situation in which 4th-grade students were supposed to be using Google to research various animals. These students were looking at a site that would be deemed more inappropriate than educational. A similar situation regarding a 3rd grader the previous school year was also discussed.

We had a child in 3rd grade last year nearly take down the county's computer system. Not only take it down but install ransomware. This kid was just very, very intelligent. Apparently, the child lived with his grandparents and they knew very little of the technology as quite frankly, a lot of us don't. Apparently, he was having some conversations with a stranger online, and this stranger was basically schooling him, grooming him, into being able to do what he did. The firewall that they had set up at the county level notified them and the head of the computer department came flying down here and stopped him just in time.

Middle school and high school teachers reported more frequent experiences with students possessing inappropriate or illegal material. One middle school teacher reported students were frequently using their school-issued devices for inappropriate sites while on their home Wi-Fi. However, once they were on the school Wi-Fi and accessed those images or sites, the school was notified. One teacher stated they felt like they were "always wiping iPads and deleting everything off of them." Another high school teacher reported students having a discussion about "nudes" on a student's phone during class. While the teacher did not view the images and the student was not in this class, the incident was reported to the administration.

One middle school teacher described a significant incident involving a 7th-grade student. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, students returned to school with 1-to-1 technology devices. A female student was playing a game on her iPad during instruction, and the device was removed from the student and placed on the teacher's desk. When the teacher opened the iPad, the Snapchat messaging app was open. This teacher clicked on the app to see a sexual photograph. The student quickly stated it was not her iPad. The teacher locked the device in the desk drawer until the end of the class and then gave it to the principal. The teacher reported they

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did not look at any other images or interactions on the device but were told by the administration that there were several inappropriate photos and conversations between the student and a much older male. This teacher elaborated:

> I have spotted and reported several inappropriate photos on students devices. The students will say "that's my boyfriend" and I'm like, he's my age! Kids don't understand that once someone turns 18, and they have those pictures, it's an entirely different situation and they are in trouble.

All teacher candidates interviewed indicated they respect the privacy of their students social media presence unless given consent to view such information. One teacher candidate currently placed in a high school setting commented they had no desire to know what students were posting on their personal social media. Another teacher candidate who is completing a CTR placement in a 6th-grade classroom explained that students will attempt to follow their personal accounts and seek their personal social media sites. After receiving a friend request from a student, the teacher candidate will explain to them that a student following a teacher's social media is inappropriate and ask if they would want teachers to follow them. The teacher candidate replied:

> One time when I asked, a girl quickly said 'no' because her TikTok has bad words on it. I want them to understand that in the same way that they don't want teachers seeing everything they post on social media, we don't want that either.

Mentor teachers said that they respected the privacy of their students social media accounts unless given permission to view them. Most said that even if they were given permission, they would not want to access them. One teacher reported that even having strict

boundaries regarding students and social media, they are seen as an adult they trust and try to share things on their social media:

> They trust me and as the year goes on they'll be like "let me show you this text somebody sent me" or they want to show me a Snap message. I don't want to see any of that so I try to keep that boundary with them. Like I don't want to be in that business because that's yours and I don't need to be in it professionally.

Another teacher remembered how it felt as a high school student whose privacy was not respected and used that experience as a guide when dealing with students. This teacher recalled a past teacher from their high school years who collected student phones and then read their notifications and text messages out loud to the class. Now that this former student is a teacher themselves, they use this experience to create rules in their classroom that meet the needs of all students. While students put their phones in a clear hanging cubby during class time, they are asked to turn their screens away and to the back of the holder. This teacher then said, "I just tell the kids that my business on my phone is not theirs, and their business is not mine. We're not paying each other's bills—it's none of my business."

Eleven of the 12 teacher candidates had no experience with cyberbullying issues. All reported they understood what cyberbullying was and how to identify these issues. Many teacher candidates responded they were trained in identifying and reporting cyberbullying through their placement school or outside sources, like training for Resident Advisors. One teacher candidate, currently in a 5th grade classroom, described a recent cyberbullying issue:

> We've had an incident already this year of a girl bullying another girl on TikTok. It puts you in an uncomfortable situation because it is not a private account, so I want to log on and investigate but I also want to respect the student's privacy. I guess these two girls

were friends then they got in a fight. The one girl was even making up fake phone

numbers and texting the other girl and posting slander videos of her on TikTok. They

were friends and the parents are involved but aren't resolving the issue. So then it's

brought to school and it's a lot of drama. So, I got the guidance counselor involved and

she's been very helpful.

More than half of the mentor teachers interviewed had dealt with some type of

cyberbullying issue, either directly or indirectly. One teacher noted how cyberbullying is difficult

to prove, and that much of it takes place outside of school. "It is incredibly difficult to catch a

cyber bully unless it's blatant, and I don't think people realize that."

In some cases, students use school-approved platforms to cyberbully another student.

One elementary mentor teacher reported that during COVID-19, Schoology was used exclusively

for assignment submissions. Students could also message one another as well as comment on

message boards. In one instance, a student was sending bullying messages via Schoology to a

less-liked student and then commenting rudely on this student's discussion board posts which

were seen by the entire class. Another elementary teacher had encountered three instances of

cyberbullying during the 2022-2023 school year. This teacher said that in two of the cases,

students were bullying one another using chat functions while gaming. The third instance

included a mother bullying a student that she claimed was bullying her child.

One middle school mentor teacher reported students using a secret chat room to bully

several different students.

A year or two ago we found out that there was this app that was used as a huge chat room

and a lot of kids had it. It was on their school iPads. Students were taking screenshots of

the chats and showing them to teachers. Because it was on their school iPad, we could

actually handle the situation and deal with it since they had agreed to that AUP (acceptable use policy) and the beginning of the year.

One mentor teacher reported that while never dealing with cyberbullying directly, noting a change in students behavior can be a sign of cyberbullying. When this occurs, the teacher will make a referral to the school's guidance counselor. The teacher said, "More often than not, it's a case of bullying, usually through Snap or Instagram."

The experiences of teacher candidates and mentor teachers vary regarding how to ensure student safety and well-being while using technology. Teacher candidates have not had the experiences of mentor teachers regarding identifying and reporting illegal or inappropriate materials or identifying and reporting cyberbullying. When teacher candidates did witness these issues, they were vigilant in notifying those responsible for handling these matters within a school.

When discussing their role in ensuring student safety when using technology, mentor teachers described different experiences, usually depending on the age group of their students. Teachers who taught in an elementary setting were less likely to report students in possession of inappropriate materials or cyberbullying. Many middle school and high school teachers had some sort of experience with one of these, or both.

All persons interviewed, however, reported they respected the privacy of their student social media presence, even when they were shown or given consent to view the material. Teacher candidates and mentor teachers both felt this was a boundary they did not wish to compromise.

Ensuring Student Confidentiality Using Social Media and Technology

Research Question Three focused on how educators ensure student confidentiality when using social media and technology. This focus included the measures educators use to ensure student information and educational records are stored and transmitted confidentially. This question also addressed educators' understanding of the intent of the Federal Educational Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA), how it applies to sharing electronic student records, and the primary source of information for educators regarding FERPA.

Teacher candidates reported differing experiences regarding student information and educational records. Teacher candidates completing student teaching in a CTR position had more access to this information than those completing traditional student teaching or a yearlong residency. Since CTR teacher candidates are the teachers of record for their classroom, they are given access to platforms such as the West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS). When using WVEIS, teachers are privy to all student information while enrolled in the West Virginia school system. This information includes individual identifying information, grade information, and documents such as Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Unique login and password protection information was provided to these teacher candidates, allowing them this access. One CTR teacher candidate described the situation in the following manner:

> Since I did start the school year a little bit later, some things were a bit different for me. All of the information sheets had been sent and returned so I had a bunch of actual paper files here. All of the other files are on WVEIS and we have a whole login thing and there's a specific password for me. And all of our online accounts like Planbook have individual teacher passwords and usernames. So, it would be very difficult for people to access those for sure.

Several teacher candidates reported not having any access to student records while completing student teaching or residency. The classroom teacher had access to the information and kept all records, including records in electronic grade platforms.

Teacher candidates indicated they used discretion and maintained confidentiality when completing assignments requiring video submissions or submissions of student work. All teacher candidates reported submitting permission forms allowing them to video during the semester. Students who did not provide consent were removed from the frame of the video or their image was blurred. When student work was submitted, student names were redacted, and work was labeled in another way to identify the work confidentially. One student described this process:

> I did the consent form and posted on Class Dojo as well about the consent form so all parents and students have access to see exactly what it is. When I do finish up my TPA (Teacher Performance Assessment), I do have to mark out a couple kids faces a couple parents did not, they sent the form back, but they did not give consent for their students to be recorded. So those will not be used or their faces will be blurred out.

Teacher candidates with access to student documents and records also reported using password-protected devices. One teacher candidate described their apprehension in the following moment, "I honestly just have faith that my computer lock works, and I am the only one who knows the password." Another teacher candidate took more extensive measures regarding their device accessibility:

> With all documents, especially digital student records, I make sure to put a lock on all of my devices and even sometimes I will put that in a separate drive or an account where I have to sign in with different login credentials. I would never want that released out on the internet.

Another teacher candidate, who is also serving in a middle school, reported encrypting student names when emailing those within her school and only using the county Wi-Fi and email platform to send this information:

> I never send anything that is outside of the school's specific places that we can transmit information. If I send anything, it's through my work email and we encrypt the students' names using like just their initials or what have you. I only use WVEIS if I need to find out anything else about a student. I don't bring student papers into the open, even in my own home. I have a specific study where I take care of my papers. I think that's the best I can take to keep my kids confidential.

Keeping work and personal devices separate was also reported as a way to protect student records and confidentiality. Two teacher candidates in CTR positions reported they do not use their personal laptops in their classroom or their work laptops at home. Another student teacher who uses a personal laptop in the classroom discussed the importance of ensuring screens are closed when using devices with the class:

> If I'm ever screen mirroring my laptop on the Apple TV in our classroom, I always make sure all of my windows are closed to start. It's important to never have the grade book or Schoology or something open if you are going to be showing your screen to the entire class. Not only is that breaking confidentiality, but that would be other violations I would think.

Mentor teachers reported more experience managing student information and records and ensuring those were stored and transmitted confidentially. All mentor teachers mentioned their use of WVEIS when viewing personal student information. Since WVEIS is login and password-

protected, and can only be used on school Wi-Fi platforms, teachers felt this information remained confidential.

Information storage platforms, like One Drive and One Note, were indicated as tools used to keep student records and information private. One mentor teacher described how their school began using One Note following a request for information during litigation that named the school as a witness:

> We were keeping binders and one of the teachers got subpoenaed by a lawyer because of parents going through a divorce and they wanted records that they had been involved in their student's education and they'd had a meeting. So, they had to dig through that binder to find this one meeting that took place two years prior. So I suggested maybe we could use something better that would be easier to find that student information. So we started using One Note. But, with that, we started using student ID numbers as a way to identify them in a search. That way their name is not attached to it, it's still searchable, but that way it keeps it private. Like if somebody would happen to get a hold of it, that would make no sense to them.

Another mentor teacher discussed the use of One Drive as a school record-keeping system to ensure student information stays organized and confidential:

> My principal likes using One Drive. We have a professional One Drive set up for the school. So, any documentation, like the beginning of the school paperwork, I'll scan it. I have my own file and then each of my students has a file in my file. Any paperwork or information about them is in their file.

Another mentor teacher reported using One Drive on their school-issued laptop for all documents. This teacher commented if a hard copy is given to them, they scan and save it to their

One Drive, and then shred it immediately. "Ninety-nine percent of my paperwork is already digital, so it makes no sense for me to keep anything hard copy." A second mentor teacher used One Drive but added security protection to each student's individual folder in the system. Like the previous teachers, each student had a unique folder where their information and records were stored. Each of these student folders then had an additional password that must be used for access. Each folder contains student information, report cards, work samples, and other important documents. This teacher indicated being especially cautious about maintaining confidentiality because "once you break confidentiality, there is no going back."

Mentor teachers reported using only their WVDE email account on school Wi-Fi when sending information electronically. Confidentiality was viewed as critical when sharing information in this platform. Mentor teachers maintained redacting names and using initials only or student ID numbers unique to every student in their school.

Special education teachers who have access to and work directly with student IEP described strict rules and guidelines governing the retrieval and editing documents. One mentor teacher reported using a unique login and password protection, in combination with a numerical login code to achieve access. This mentor teacher also commented, "If the screen is motionless for a certain amount of time, the program will automatically sign you out."

Another mentor teacher described a student incident involving a call to Child Protective Services (CPS). The call and visit that followed included several people present in the school office. Therefore, discretion was imperative.

I told the people in the office today that we are not talking about this. You know when you have a meeting and a student has some sort of IEP or 504 Plan, you know the people who are allowed to be in that meeting and those are the only people you are discussing

this with. I just live by the rule to not talk about other kids. I live by the rule that anything about a specific kid is no one else's business.

When asked whether they understood the intent of FERPA, 11 of 12 teacher candidates responded they did understand FERPA's intent and how it applied to sharing electronic student records. One student responded that they did not know what FERPA stood for. Teacher candidates reported their primary sources of information concerning FERPA were provided by their education courses at the university, as well as information and training provided by placement counties. One CTR teacher candidate responded:

I had to do a very long training about that before I started and that was all new to me for sure. I missed out on a lot of the training before school started, so it was an electronic training but that helped me understand it all a little bit more.

All mentor teachers interviewed reported understanding the intent of FERPA and how it applied to sharing student records electronically. All mentor teachers reported receiving information and training on the topic from their respective counties, especially prior to the start of a new school year. FERPA training typically occurred in the form of Safe School modules that every teacher in the state must complete prior to the start of the school year. One mentor teacher commented that while the topic was included in self-paced modules, the school administrator had provided separate training on the topic because "it's just one of those things that's extremely important." Mentor teachers were required to score 80% or better on the FERPA training modules to ensure they understood the requirements.

One mentor teacher reflected on teaching during the Covid pandemic and how that experience improved their understanding of FERPA:

It's easier to understand in the classroom setting now because, during Covid times when we were, you know, teaching digitally, FERPA was a huge issue because kid's cameras were on and you know, they're in the classroom together and something might be happening at their house and that would reveal something. Anything could come up and there were a couple of issues that we did run into during that time. I do feel like it is much easier to keep that confidentiality in terms of being in my classroom and being virtual.

Mentor teachers noted that discretion is necessary during discussions about and with students. One teacher elaborated on discussions with students, parents, and administrators and how those could break confidentiality if handled incorrectly:

If I've ever had to like talk about any kind of record about a student, it's in a private meeting with an administrator with that student and their parents. I try not to talk to students about their grades in a way that would reveal anything out loud if they are like "hey, can we look at this together?" I am not going to say "Well, you've got five zeros." I will just point to the screen or point to the grade. I try to do things like that to stay private if it's in a group setting. I try to keep that under wraps and private or I may even step out into the hall if the hall is empty. I just try to keep that conversation very much between the two of us.

Both mentor teachers and teacher candidates used additional measures to ensure student confidentiality. Strategies mentioned included using only school-issued laptops in the classroom and personal laptops at home, sending emails regarding individual students on school Wi-Fi and school platforms, and redacting all identifying information or using only student identification numbers. The use of storage platforms like One Note and One Drive was noted as important for

the storage and sharing of student information and records securely. Mentor teachers and teacher candidates used discretion when discussing personal information, such as grades, with students.

Mentor teachers and teacher candidates showed an awareness of and understanding of FERPA as it applies to the classroom setting. Teacher candidates received information from the university as well as guidance from placement schools and mentor teachers. Mentor teachers reported completing required training annually and participating in additional training provided by administrators.

Promoting the Appropriate Use of Technology in the Educational Setting

Research Question Four focused on how to promote the appropriate use of technology in an educational setting. This question concentrated on how educators advocate for equal access to technology for all students, especially those historically underserved. This question also addressed how educators promote various technological applications with colleagues, other school personnel, parents, and community members. Finally, the question explores how educators promote technological applications that are appropriate for individual student needs, that students understand how to use, and that assist and enhance the teaching and learning process.

Teacher candidates indicated students had access to 1-to-1 technology in their placement classrooms, but there were different parameters depending upon the school and teacher. Many mentor teachers opted to keep student-assigned technology in the classroom and not allow it to go home at the risk of not being returned. Teacher candidates in kindergarten, first, and second grades did not feel that it was necessary to take iPads or laptops home each day to complete assignments. Teacher candidates also responded that in situations where technology access was

limited, ensuring all students could complete assignments was key. One candidate described the challenge in the following manner:

> If the school doesn't actively provide it or supply students with those means, I would stay off technology, I really like pen and paper work, so I think that also makes it the most equal, because students usually have access to pen and paper or I can provide pencil and paper versus log on to Schoology and your laptop's not charged because you mom didn't pay the electric bill because you know chain of events.

Some teacher candidates emphasized that making technology use mandatory for classwork was not feasible in their classroom due to a lack of internet access for students. One teacher candidate noted "For those kids who maybe don't even still have access to the Internet at home, I try to limit the amount of online homework I send home. If I do send something home, I try to make sure that it can be done on paper". Another teacher candidate provided paper copies of all assignments posted online to ensure all students had access to the assignment in one form or another.

One teacher candidate reported students are issued Chromebooks for their classroom, but they are not permitted to take these home. The teacher candidate indicated no assignment is given that would require students take their technology home to be able to complete it:

> I don't assign anything that's online that I don't give time in class to do. There's no reason that they should have to take their laptop home. If their parents have one, that's fine. They can do whatever because that's their own home computer. But I don't want them to take their Chromebooks home because I don't want to be responsible.

All mentor teachers reported their students had 1-to-1 access to some form of technology, usually a laptop or iPad. Several mentor teachers mentioned a discounted internet program

available to students who meet certain financial requirements. Families can apply for the Affordable Connectivity Program, established by the Federal Communications Commission, which drastically reduces the cost of Internet services. One mentor teacher described the impact of this option, "They can get a discount on their internet just for being a Cabell County student. That's been a game changer."

While students have 1-to-1 school-issued technology, they do not always keep track of these devices. When situations like this occur, teachers must adjust their instruction to ensure students can be successful. One teacher described how they remedy this:

> Everybody has, but I will always get students who transfer in late, and they don't have one yet from the school or they forgot it or some students have literally lost them and the school won't give them a new one. If it is something that has to be done online, but they don't have a laptop, I will literally log them into mine, which is probably not allowed, but I will so that they have that same opportunity as everybody else. That doesn't happen often, but I've had like digital quizzes on the digital textbook or like stuff like that. The other thing that I typically just have to resort to though is just printing everything out, which is not the same as them having that technology. So, are they still doing the work? Yes, but it's not the same. Things like that come up constantly and it is difficult at times to keep it completely equal. They're just going to be students and that's a struggle.

Other mentor teachers felt using less technology is sometimes more conducive to student needs. They stated they were moving away from dependence on technology for instruction. "I usually don't post assignments online and if I do, I walk the kids through the steps of how to download it and save it so they can access it at home without Wi-Fi."

Teacher candidates reported using several methods to promote the benefits of various

appropriate technological applications with colleagues, school personnel, parents, and

community members. Many teacher candidates used team planning periods to share information

with colleagues about innovative technological applications for their classrooms:

>One of my placement teachers and I used to swap ideas all of the time about technology
>
>and stuff like that. Like for example there was this one Chrome extension I told her about
>
>that you could use called Hypothesis where it allows you to annotate and describe any
>
>online article and it's just amazing. You don't have to actually print it out and where
>
>everything is so technology-based and every student has an iPad or computer, having that
>
>extension on their computers made annotating and highlighting process much easier in
>
>her classroom. I saw her the other day and she told me she still uses it.

Other teacher candidates were introduced to technological applications by previous

mentor teachers, and then shared that information in their current placements. One music teacher

candidate discussed using a school application for composing provided by a previous mentor

teacher that they shared with their current mentor. This teacher candidate elaborated on how they

share ideas, sending TikTok videos of new ideas to one another.

A CTR teacher candidate reported that collaboration with colleagues took place in person

and online. This teacher candidate described this approach, "we have our lunch breaks where we

are together and during our planning, we'll sometimes talk about cool ideas that we've seen, and

we have a group text we'll send each other links to things."

Teacher candidates used various forms of technology to share information with parents.

Some teacher candidates used Class Dojo to send information or videos regarding instruction,

new concepts, and upcoming events. One teacher candidate used a QR code to direct parents to

information. "I'm doing a "dress like an idiom" day so I put a QR code to a Pinterest board of costume ideas. I feel like that's a way to involve parents and keep them involved in their students' activities at school."

One CTR teacher candidate responded that explaining to the students and parents what the technological application's purpose is and how the student can benefit has improved engagement and learning.

> We have just started a program that I have to specifically use in my classroom called Achieve 3000. I have talked to a couple of parents about grades and whatnot. I have pushed the kids to use it and said "We need to work on this because it's going to help you with your ability to read informational text and then follow through with comprehension. This can boost your writing skills." I explained to the parents that it's tailored specifically to you, so it is not set at a level that is impossible for you to be successful at.

Teacher candidates discussed how sharing with other teacher candidates has helped improve their technological application skills and use. One candidate said, "We use Go Noodle for brain breaks. I've talked so much about these with my peers, like which ones are fun and the kids get into more."

Another teacher candidate who is placed in a traditional student teaching setting described how they could apply this process to their future classroom.

> I think I'm going to just tell parents and students and colleagues we are moving forward in the technological age and technology is going to be integrated even more and more every year. The thing is, it's hard for us as adults to learn more than students because they're younger and their minds are more malleable. We have a hard time with it and it takes us longer to learn it. But kids learn quicker and if we get them into it now, it's just

going to make their lives easier in the long run. They're going to do great things. Greater things that we are able to do now because we have limitations to our learning. You have to teach them that this stuff is useful but it's not a substitute for one-on-one interaction.

Mentor teachers promote the benefits of appropriate technological applications in several ways. In most school systems, approved applications are loaded onto school devices and others are blocked or limited without permission. One mentor teacher commented they would love to use more applications, but going through the proper channels at the county level was necessary. "I submit a form and I tell them what the app is or whatever I them to download and they'll review it and typically, if it's a good one, they'll push it out to all of the iPads. Nearpod was one of those."

Mentor teachers used professional development sessions as a way to share new information with colleagues. One mentor teacher who is a presenter at county professional development sessions said they focus not only on applications that teachers can use, but also ones that help make a teacher's life easier. Another mentor teacher discussed how a recent professional development they attended on the benefit of using games and apps to assist with engagement in special education classrooms:

They shared a lot of good things about using Minecraft. It's a lot of problem-solving. There was a study that was done that it really helps with children with autism because the characters don't show a whole lot of emotion and they relate to that a little bit better than the emotional aspects of other games. They've shown improvements where there are actually nonverbal students with autism that become verbal through using that game because they relate more to those characters than they would it being human on human in many cases.

Ensuring that students had the understanding to use technological applications was also important to many mentor teachers. One high school mentor commented that many teachers assume students can use the technology when in fact many cannot complete simple tasks on applications. This included attaching documents or photographs to email and saving photographs from the Internet. This teacher stated that it is assumed that students know how to complete these tasks because they are digital natives, but that is not always the case.

> The things that we just assume that they know how to do, a lot of them have no clue how to do. So, I think that's one of the most important things that I have to do early on in the year. And if it's something I want them to use, like Google Docs or Google Slides, I try to show that in action on my Promethean board and try to show them the benefits of it so they can actually see it in use.

Some veteran teachers are apprehensive when using new technology in the classroom. One mentor teacher described how they are typically the teacher in the building who is using new technology and sharing their thoughts and demonstrating how to use the technology in staff or PLC meetings. This mentor teacher said "It happens to me a lot because I just like to do it. I'm not afraid of it. If it's a new app or program, I'll just go with it and play with it to figure it out and if I like it or how it works."

While technological applications were useful to many mentor teachers, one mentor teacher explained how using technology was not always the most efficient strategy. In some circumstances, using technology could limit engagement and understanding:

> There are programs that just don't work. In my honors class before we got our physical textbooks that are consumable and that they can annotate right in, rip out pages, all the things, we used the online textbook. It glitched, they couldn't annotate, they kept losing

their logins, I had to reset their passwords. I was just like this is not working. This is not the most efficient way. I communicated that to them like we're going to do the best we can until we get our real textbooks. This is definitely not the best option for us and we're just going to get through it. This was definitely a limitation.

Teacher candidates introduced their students to technological applications that were appropriate for students' individual needs, enhanced the teaching and learning process and were easy for students to use. However, most teacher candidates reported they applied the technological applications their mentor teachers used in their teaching. One teacher candidate discussed using two different applications when creating a podcast with their students.

I've been using Canva and GarageBand. I've been trying to show them how they can use these and tie it into language arts. They can use it for branding and to show symbolism through the images that they're making and in the music that they're choosing.

Mentor teachers promoted technological applications that were appropriate, easy to use and understand, and enhanced the learning process in their classrooms. Several mentor teachers reported that while the applications were part of a county platform, they were able to individualize them to meet the needs of students:

I mainly use Schoology. If I can get them on their Schoology, they're good to go. If I can get them on Clever or Nearpod, they're good to go. I want them to be able to use what they have right there in front of them. My textbook is Discovery Education, and I can link that directly through their Schoology. I can also use Teachers Pay Teachers to download and link maps that would take me hours to create on my own. On Clever and Nearpod, everything is set to the student's level and needs.

One elementary mentor teacher replied, "Our science curriculum, Twig, has some digital aspects to it that you can tier. News ELA is one of my favorites. I use News ELA and they can tier based on Lexile." A high school mentor teacher described a new application from the county that would benefit their students:

I need to be better at this because I always feel like we have to go to another training because we have another thing we have to use. This year there is this program called Paper. It's one of these apps we can use through Clever. It's essentially like 24/7 tutors or online help. I've going to give that as an option to my students. If they are struggling with something or they don't have time to come and see me during homeroom in the morning or they don't have time after school or whatever, that would be a resource for them to get a little bit of extra help on writing assignments or something else because there are different tutors for all different subjects.

Many mentor teachers focused on applications that students can use to learn skills for use now and in the future. This included skills such as typing, recording and podcasting, and coding. One mentor shared "I try to use technology like coding, which is what these kids are going to grow up doing. We work with coding apps. I try to get their hands on that and give them a taste of it."

Both teacher candidates and mentor teachers promoted equal access to technology for all students. All teacher candidates and mentor teachers are teaching in classrooms with one-to-one technology. Some of these devices remain in the classroom and are not taken home, while some students are permitted to use these devices after school hours. Ensuring that students had access to the Internet was also important for both teacher candidates and mentor teachers. If students did not have home internet access, hot spots for home use were provided, as well as alternative

methods to complete assignments. When students did not possess their school-issued devices, teacher candidates and mentor teachers provided other school-issued devices or paper copies.

Teacher candidates and mentor teachers shared technological applications with colleagues and parents in several ways. Teacher candidates shared applications they were exposed to in previous clinical experiences or through their coursework at the university with mentor teachers and other colleagues. Some shared ideas through social media sites like TikTok or group text messages. Teacher candidates used QR codes, as well as messaging through school-approved platforms to inform parents and explain the benefits of various technological applications.

Mentor teachers shared information about the benefits and limitations of various technological applications with colleagues through professional development sessions and other group meetings. Some teachers utilized the technology and reported their findings back to others, often offering to demonstrate or assist. Many teachers utilized the technological applications provided by their counties and requested access to others through the proper channels when they felt the applications would benefit student learning and engagement. While technology was useful in most settings, it was not always appropriate and did not enhance learning in all instances.

Teacher candidates were more likely to use the technological applications their mentor teachers used than introduce new programs to support individual learning. Some teacher candidates utilized applications to increase engagement and give a better understanding of how the applications could be used in a career setting.

Mentor teachers focused on their county-approved technological applications as well as implementing new technology that enhanced teaching and learning. Introducing students to

applications that would assist them now and in the future was important. Using applications that were easily accessible through approved platforms was essential.

Differences Based on Demographic Attributes

Teacher candidates and mentor teachers expressed similar views regarding personal social media and the importance of separating this from their professional lives. Some aspects, however, did display differences in relation to the demographic information of each group.

Both teacher candidates and mentor teachers reported they understood the importance of keeping all social media platform settings private to ensure students, parents, and the public could not access their information. Both groups agreed they would not allow students to follow their social media platforms, especially while students are in their classroom or school. Teacher candidates did not allow parents to follow their social media platforms, but some mentor teachers allowed this. The mentor teachers who did allow parents to follow their social media accounts identified as male; no female mentor teachers permitted parents to follow their personal social media accounts. These mentor teachers were flexible in their contact methods with parents or knew these parents outside of school. One mentor teacher explained:

I can say there are a lot of parents that friend me on social media and I allow that on there because it doesn't upset the county. They reach out to me if they need something or ask questions about upcoming events or about school and I'm OK to help them out, however, students are off limits. Parents can get on there, but there's nothing to see. I'm pretty boring. I've got my mom, my grandmother. I'm not putting anything crazy on there.

Teacher candidates reported that while they assisted with accounts of various activities in which they participated, they did not have separate professional educator accounts. Some mentor teachers reported they were administrators on their school or other organization accounts, and a

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few mentor teachers responded they did have separate educator accounts. Mentor teachers commented, however, that these separate accounts could be more confusing, and it was difficult to separate yourself between each account. One mentor teacher described a time when they posted to the wrong account accidentally:

> I had a major user error. I was supposed to send out a Dojo message to parents and it was a picture. I accidentally pressed the wrong picture, and it was some laminate samples when I was building my house and I sent that out instead. Luckily, all of the parents were chill about it and were actually joking about which one I should pick. It would have been much worse depending on the photo. That could have gone way bad.

The way teacher candidates and mentor teachers stayed abreast of current trends in technology varied. Many teacher candidates discussed using social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, to acquire knowledge on classroom technology and how to use these programs. Mentor teachers who considered themselves more "tech savvy" were also more likely to obtain information on new technology trends through social media, while other mentor teachers tended to depend on training provided by their county and school. Those mentor teachers who used social media to obtain information about technology in the classroom fell into either the 20-29 age bracket or the 30-39 age bracket. One teacher candidate described using TikTok and other resources for this information:

> I follow a lot of other teachers on TikTok and Instagram. I listen to a podcast that consists of teachers off duty, and they talk about different trends that are coming along. They all work in different schools, so they have a diverse exposure to what's going on.

A mentor teacher discussed using social media to acquire new uses of technology for their classroom:

I do all of that research on my own on my free time. I'm telling you, TikTok is the hottest

thing. I can find so many things through their trends, I do TikTok and YouTube and

Instagram exclusively. I just kind of scroll through there. I'm on teacher TikTok and

Instagram and I like it. They're very real, the ones I see. I follow the teachers that are

doing the real stuff and not the cute stuff.

Another mentor teacher explained how they gain knowledge of technology for their classroom:

Honestly, one of the big things is just collaboration with other educators that I know

personally in the school. Recently we've had some good training for social studies,

specifically during our district professional development days. They brought in trainers

with specific emphasis on social studies to show us new technological platforms and

things like that.

Both teacher candidates and mentor teachers felt they were diligent in identifying and

addressing technology issues related to student safety, including inappropriate materials and

cyberbullying. Teacher candidates had little experience with either of these issues. They felt this

was due to their limited time in the classroom. Mentor teachers who taught in middle school and

high school settings experienced more of these issues than mentor teachers in elementary school

settings. Mentor teachers interviewed who teach in elementary school classrooms were more

likely to keep devices at school and did not allow those to be used at home, while the students at

middle school and high school took these devices home each day. A teacher candidate who is

placed in an elementary school classroom explained:

The iPads don't leave the classroom. They use them at centers, to listen to books, stuff

like that. It's a first-grade classroom. They don't have social media. They know what it is

but they don't actually have it, at least I don't think that they do. None of the kids have

phones. It's not like they would know how to cyber bully. There's still some that don't

even know every single letter of the alphabet.

A mentor teacher in a middle school setting explained having a strict phone policy in the

classroom also helped deter inappropriate use of technology. They described how this maintains

proper classroom technology use:

> I don't want to see it. I don't want to hear it. I stole a really good technique from another
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> teacher. I have a "headphone light". It's just this pretty light in the front of the classroom.
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> When I turn it on, you're allowed to listen to your music. If you're listening to your
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> music through your phone, I should see your headphones but never see your phone. They
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> have everything they need on their iPad, and I can monitor that through Apple
>
> Classroom.

> Mentor teachers had more experience utilizing electronic student records and keeping

those records safe. Teacher candidates and mentor teachers understood the expectations of

FERPA, receiving training and guidance through their school and county administrators. Teacher

candidates were most exposed to electronic student records through the completion of their West

Virginia Teacher Performance Assessment (WVTPA). All teacher candidates interviewed

mentioned the WVTPA as an exposure to ensuring student records were kept safe. Teacher

candidates discussed using initials and numbers to identify student work and assessment data,

and redacting student names from work samples. Mentor teachers elaborated on their use of

WVEIS, as well as systems implemented by their school and county, including One Drive and

One Note. One teacher candidate explained the measures they take to ensure student

confidentiality is protected:

It changes every day. Back in the day, you could cover up the name and that was good. But what about the handwriting? It's complicated. So, I always say don't let people see the kid's name or anything that identifies them. The good news is we have a system when I do have to send electronic files. But if I send a photo or post a picture of something I'm doing in class, I will blur faces, put emojis over students faces, make sure no clothing that could identify them is showing. I typically just try to stay away from doing anything like that.

The ways that teacher candidates and mentor teachers advocated for the equal use of technology varied depending on the county in which the teacher candidate and mentor teacher were employed. Most counties in West Virginia have a 1-to-1 technology policy, but all do not provide internet access at home. One county provided take-home hot spots as well as hot spots throughout different points in the county. Other counties did not provide this access. The type of assignments that were assigned often depended upon whether students had internet access at home.

Demographics of teacher candidates and mentor teachers played a significant role in the responses to some research questions. Teacher candidates in elementary school settings were less likely to experience issues such as inappropriate materials or cyberbullying. Teacher candidates placed in secondary school settings had more exposure to issues such as this. Male mentor teachers were more relaxed in allowing parents to follow their personal social media accounts than female mentor teachers. Mentor teachers in the 20-29 and 30-39 age brackets were more willing to explore social media to seek out and implement new forms of technology in the classroom. Mentor teachers who fell into the older age brackets were more likely to use

technology in the classroom that was provided by state and county resources. Race was not a factor in any responses.

Best Practices for Educators Using Social Media

Research Question Six examined best practices regarding social media usage as recommended by teacher candidates and mentor teachers. One common theme, privacy, emerged from the interview data.

All teacher candidates indicated their social media accounts are set to private. While this is a recommendation of the MU COEPD through their social media policy, most teacher candidates indicated they perceived this as common sense. Four teacher candidates identified as not being avid social media users. While all had at least one social media account or profile, most of the time they were only used for groups and not for individual posts. Teacher candidates indicated that if accounts are set to private, there is less worry about what you post or who is viewing it.

Teacher candidates felt ensuring that all social media accounts were set to private and only accepted followers upon request was necessary. One teacher candidate elaborated:

You need to always have all of your social media private. I know some people for some reason like to have those public because for whatever reason, I think to them it's more for popularity or to look a certain way. But with many jobs, when you sign up for something, you kind of give up privacy. But for teaching, I would suggest you make everything private.

Teacher candidates were careful when determining who they would accept as followers on social media accounts. More than half of teacher candidates indicated they would not accept students or parents on social media while others were still establishing those boundaries.

Students have tried to reach out to me on Facebook Messenger and friend me. Parents are actually pretty good about sticking to Schoology. On my syllabus, when I sent it out, that's how I requested to be contacted, either through Schoology or my school email. I haven't had parents try to message me on social media yet.

A teacher candidate hired in a CTR position felt conflicted when accepting parents as followers on social media. The candidate explained this conflict:

I don't even accept parent friend requests, and sometimes I feel bad about that. But at the same time, you just never know. I like to post things where I've just gotten a job because my dreams are coming true and I want to post pictures of my classroom, but never my students. I like to share my teaching journey with my friends and family, but my students are parents stay out of it.

Appropriate social media posts were also included in best practices by teacher candidates. By censoring your post or giving what you post a second thought, teacher candidates agreed would help alleviate issues now and, in the future, should a parent, student, or potential employer examine your social media. A teacher candidate currently completing Residency 1 provided this rationale:

I would just think about what you're about to post. There's been many times where even if my Facebook is private, I think about posting or retweeting something or reposting something and I'm like maybe let's hold off. Like if you think it's just an offhanded, like little joke, maybe double think about that, think about the worst-case scenario. Like what is the worst way somebody could take something.

One teacher candidate discussed how social media posts can be misconstrued. This teacher candidate provided this advice:

Always watch what you post because people are always wanting to know what you are

doing. I would probably only use my platform for positive aspects of my life. I wouldn't

just get on there and bash someone. People are always looking for others to do that.

Several teacher candidates indicated they have special settings on social media to keep from

being "tagged" in private photographs. One teacher candidate elaborated:

I don't want students seeing photos I post or that other people post of me, changing your

photo settings to "friends only" is really important. Students are going to look you up.

You're their teacher. They want to see what you're up to. They want to see what your

life's like.

Another teacher candidate likened social media posts to sharing information with family. "If you

have second thoughts about posting something, then don't post it. Don't post something you

wouldn't want your grandma to see."

Even though teacher candidates did attempt to set boundaries, there were instances where

students did not respect those boundaries. One CTR teacher candidate stated that even though all

of the settings were private and parents and students were not accepted as followers on social

media, students and parents still attempted to seek out their social media platforms:

One of my students literally today said "my mom found your Facebook and it was

private, but she found your account and looked at your profile picture and I saw it, too." I

think parents try to be sneaky, trying to friend you and then some parents have bad

intentions. I also think that kids might even get on their parent's phones and try to find

you on social media.

Another teacher candidate discussed an incident that happened in the classroom, not involving

social media, but digital presence.

Yesterday I had a student looking through all of my information through Google and she looked at my name. She found old records and me playing high school football. She found my Spotify account. Luckily all of this is private stuff so she couldn't see anything, but it's just an example of everything that is kept on record on social media.

Teacher candidates also reflected on how social media presence can affect you professionally, now and in the future. A teacher candidate elaborated:

The number one thing is make sure that your account is private, and if you don't have anything that you want the public to see, especially parents and other educators, maybe even superintendents from your district, you may not want to post it on there. Just being smart about what you post, being safe about what you send out on the internet, and making sure you don't violate anyone's personal space or even your own.

Teacher candidates felt setting clear boundaries with students and parents regarding social media is critical. One teacher candidate explained:

Keeping yourself separate from your students as much as you can as far as social media goes, making sure you do have that personal and professional line drawn when it comes to your social media presence and then just trying to keep the kids off of it as much as possible when they're in a learning environment would be my idea of a best practice.

Mentor teachers agreed setting accounts to private and not accepting students on social media is essential. While some mentor teachers did allow parents as friends on social media accounts, they drew a hard line on accepting students as followers. One mentor teacher referred to a former high school teacher and their philosophy of having students on social media:

Privacy settings are for wandering eyes. I know when I was in high school, a teacher I had always said "I'm not going to be your friend on anything until after I have you in

class for the legality of it all." So, like nothing gets misconstrued or no one is like "this person's talking to this child out of school hours" or things like that.

Some mentor teachers indicated they permitted parents to follow them on social media. One mentor teacher commented on the philosophy behind doing so:

I just have a different outlook on it and I feel like I'm Ok with parents sending me friend requests and seeking out other ways to reach me because at the end of the day I am here for them and I want to help them. I'm OK with it.

Another mentor teacher discussed the importance of these boundaries because of the importance of teachers as role models. This mentor teacher elaborated:

I feel that teachers should not interact with students on social media at all. We all have private lives and I think we should try to keep some of our private lives to ourselves and not broadcast it on social media because we are, whether we like it or not, we are role models to a lot of students and in many cases, we are the only stable figure they see on a daily basis. So, I think it's important that we keep that in mind.

Some mentor teachers indicated they permitted parents to follow them on social media. One mentor teacher commented on the philosophy behind doing so:

I just have a different outlook on it and I feel like I'm Ok with parents sending me friend requests and seeking out other ways to reach me because at the end of the day I am here for them and I want to help them. I'm OK with it.

Another mentor teacher who does allow parents as followers mentioned always erring on the side of caution with social media posts, as students will log into their parents accounts. This mentor teacher described one interaction:

I think you should always err on the side of caution because your students will find you. Whether you know it or not, you have students watching you, and not just watching you at school. They're watching your social media. I found that a lot of my students have access to their parents social media. So a lot of time, students will say "Oh, I saw your picture on Facebook" and I'm friends with their mom on social media. I think you should always be very aware that people can always access your information, whether you want them to or not.

Two mentor teachers recommended keeping both professional and personal social media accounts to maintain those boundaries. One mentor teacher keeps both accounts and guards who follows the personal account and is not afraid to "cut people out". Many mentor teachers mentioned the school levy in their county and the cuts that the board of education is planning to make. One mentor teacher said, "I may not agree with what is happening, but I'm not putting it out there." Another mentor teacher mentioned that while we have freedom of speech, posting on a public social media forum and speaking negatively of your employer is not good practice. This mentor teacher explained:

You can definitely disagree, you can definitely have opinions, but be aware that people can and will take whatever you say, and they will use it against you. You can say the most innocent thing and they will, if a parent finds it, they will twist it to fit their narrative.

Another teacher, however, replied they did not believe it was possible for them to have professional and personal social media accounts and keep those private. This mentor teacher explained:

I don't think there's anything wrong with a teacher account. I know a lot of people that

do that and parents seem to like that, too. I just don't want to tiptoe over the line. My

aspect on it is and, like I said, this is not for everybody, but I don't feel like the two can

coexist. My personal views are not the same thing as my educational views, you know? I

don't think the two can coexist in a responsible way, that's why I only choose to have a

personal account and keep it private.

Being aware of what you are posting was also deemed a best practice by mentor teachers.

Establishing boundaries regarding personal social media posts was important to mentor teachers

because of the public awareness of their profession. Several mentor teachers abstained from

posting anything socially charged given the potential for misrepresentation by parents or

administrators.

Some mentor teachers discussed the importance of not using language that could be

deemed inappropriate or posting anything related to alcohol on social media. One mentor teacher

provided specific recommendations:

Think about what you post. Your language. Swearing and profanity. Do I use a little bit

here and there? Yes. But I'm not going to get on social media and lose my mind. At the

end of the day, it's your private account. Can you post yourself having a beer in your

backyard? Sure. At the same time, don't post yourself drunk in the backyard. I think you

have to set hard boundaries of what's appropriate and what's not and just stick to them

because if not, you're asking for trouble. You're an adult and you want to be treated like

a professional, but teachers are held to a higher standard. You've got to watch what you

put out there.

Mentor teachers also discussed how their private lives are not considered private because of their careers in education and how anything derogatory can affect your career. One mentor teacher replied, "They see you as public servants and so in people's minds. It's like, well, you don't have a life outside of this room." Another mentor teacher concurred:

> We are kind of like celebrities. We're held to a higher standard and if we're going to go out and tie one on one night, we don't need to post it all over Facebook where everybody's going to see it. I'm a firm believer that the one thing that teachers have that's so easily ruined is our reputation and our integrity and those are things that don't have to be proven. They just have to be allegations and it can ruin a teacher and that's that.

Yet another mentor teacher discussed the problems that can arise from sharing posts from other sources:

> When you share something, know what source you are sharing it from. I still second guess myself and sometimes think "Should I have shared that?" or what if someone thinks that I'm a certain way? But then I also have to show myself grace because I'm not going to post anything intentionally that's inappropriate.

Mentor teachers noted that while the First Amendment protects free speech, that protection is not always applicable regarding personal social media posts. One teacher explained:

> You can definitely disagree; you can definitely have opinions. But beware that people can and will take whatever you say, and they will use it against you. You can say the most innocent thing and if a parent finds it, they will twist it to fit their narrative. I've seen people just act stupid on the Internet and they get found out and they get in trouble.

Another mentor teacher noted the importance of considering their employer and how they could view their social media posts:

> Is it something that would make you mad if somebody was working for you to see that you are posting that? I try to put myself in the other person's perspective like our superintendent. If I post this, is it going to make them upset? And realizing that if you're making something public that maybe you should keep some of your opinions, that might be negative toward your employer. You know we have freedom of speech, but if it's on a public forum and you're working for that company or that employer, maybe you don't want to share that on social media.

Mentor teachers mentioned not accepting students as friends on social media until they have graduated and are considered adults. One mentor teacher replied, "Don't become friends with your students until they've graduated. I've very strict about that." Another mentor teacher elaborated:

> I definitely think you don't let your students follow you or follow them back until it feels appropriate. High schoolers and middle schoolers use social media a lot. It just feels weird to me, so I just say don't do it all. I just don't until they're out of my building.

Past experiences, as well as the experiences of other educators, guide mentor teachers in determining best practices regarding social media usage. The decision to keep social media accounts private and opting to not accept parents as followers on social media, were typically determined by prior experiences. One mentor teacher described an interaction with a parent, who was also an educator, during a scheduled vacation:

> I'll never forget this parent was a teacher and she was messaging me as I was literally boarding a plane to Mexico on spring break, wanting to know if I could conference with

her and talk to her about her kids grade. And then went and reported me to my principal,

saying I was unavailable, and I was like "I was walking on the tarmac to the plane."

That's when I shut mine down and decided no more.

Another teacher explained they consider keeping social media private a best practice due to their personal actions of seeking out information on others on social media.

What's the first thing I did when I found out who my clinical student was? I went to Facebook and I looked her up. I looked under her pictures. I looked to see what she posted, how she interacted. That's the first thing I did, and I know that the first thing parents do when they figure out that I'm their kids teacher.

Keeping social media accounts set as private and setting boundaries with who followed them on these accounts were deemed best practices by both teacher candidates and mentor teachers. Both teacher candidates and mentor teachers reported they give extra thought to any posts or pictures shared on social media in case they are viewed by a student or parent.

Teacher candidates indicated they did not allow parents to follow their social media accounts, while some mentor teachers were more flexible in doing so. Mentor teachers who permitted parents to follow their social media accounts noted they were careful about what was shared and posted and did not make themselves available for communication outside of the school day.

Both teacher candidates and mentor teachers indicated that being an educator caused them to give additional thought to what is posted on their personal social media accounts. Both groups agreed that although teachers are human and do have personal lives, sharing anything negative or that could be deemed derogatory was not appropriate.

Challenges for Educators Using Social Media

Teacher candidates and mentor teachers identified several challenges for educators who use social media, both personally and professionally. The strategies educators use to acquire information about appropriate and inappropriate uses of social media were also discussed.

When using social media personally, teacher candidates noted the curiosity of students as one of their biggest challenges. All teacher candidates stated they would not accept students as followers on social media accounts and kept all accounts private. However, students will attempt to view their pages and follow them on several occasions. One teacher candidate discussed a time a student from a previous clinical experience sought them out on social media:

> So, I had a student of mine from my last clinical, he was a little football player and was a big fan of mine when I was there, and he wants to try to follow me on Instagram. I told him just this week that it's unprofessional and I can't let him. One yesterday sent me a friend request that I have in class right now. I think they just want to see what my life is like.

Another CTR teacher candidate teaching in their hometown described the challenges of such a scenario:

> I told the kids not to friend me. I'm not accepting your friend request. So, they friended my boyfriend. Since I'm from here, I know a lot of them outside of school because they're close to my brothers age. They're just obsessed. They think it's funny. They try to look me up on Google, too.

Some teacher candidates discussed challenges they have encountered in relation to their parents who were educators. One teacher candidate reflected on challenges faced by their mother, an elementary teacher and middle school coach:

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I haven't had any personal challenges, but I have lived them secondhand through my

mother. She's had parents catch her in grocery stores, she's had parents message her

during the summer wanting to talk. They're not even her friends on Facebook, they're

just message requesting like "I want to talk to you about my child. My child needs help."

These were parents she had contacted to come into school, and they never would. It's

almost like when parents see teachers on social media, they're like, "Oh, I can get out of

going to the school." And my mom is a volleyball coach. Last week they had 27 girls

come out and they can only keep 17. She's had 6 parents message her on Facebook just

nasty things. She's upset. She told me all she can do is not engage. You just can't

entertain it.

Another teacher candidate described the social media challenges they faced with having a parent

serve in an important position within the county school system they attended. This teacher

candidate explained:

Whenever he had that position, it was really difficult having social media. Constantly

having people message me being like "Is he going to close school today?" "Is this going

to happen?" Especially during Covid it was so crazy because we didn't get to have a

graduation. Sometimes it would be adults messaging me saying "hey, can you tell you

dad to call me at this number?" Sometimes I just wouldn't read the messages. Sometimes

people were talking bad about my dad on social media. I won't lie. I did "like" the posts

that were mean so people would see that I knew. Like you're talking about him on social

media, and you think I can't see it. I would sometimes answer peoples questions but

sometimes I'd get really angry and say you'll know when you know.

Many teacher candidates responded that separating their lives on social media as young adults and now as educators was difficult at times. One teacher candidate discussed the challenge of sharing personal and political beliefs on social media:

I think me being worried about things I post has increased. Like before I would go to a protest and everything like that and I would post about me going to these pro-choice protests. But then once I started getting into the classroom and the college of ed started following me on Instagram, I was thinking let's just not cause anything. I might not post from a protest anymore, but I still will post a picture that says, "girls just want to have fundamental rights". But I'm also going to be a social studies teacher, so I'll also be talking about your right to protest.

One teacher candidate who allowed fellow educators to follow her on social media shared concerns about posts that could be viewed out of context. This teacher candidate explained:

I am still you, so of course I like to have fun and stuff. But I cannot post those type of things, not because I'm like a crazy partier or anything, but because I don't want anything taken out of context or to make it seem like I'm less able to do my job. I actually had one teacher friend me last year and like three or four friend me this year and they're all teachers that I interact with well and they help me out with things. I like that we are able to be friends on Facebook and I'm able to see more of their lives, but they can also see more of mine.

Another teacher candidate discussed their challenge using social media is how other teacher candidates portrayed themselves and how they did not feel as though they were performing at their level. This teacher candidate elaborated:

I think the only challenges I face are just seeing other people and expecting and wanting to be that and not really just seeing them and thinking they are doing great. I see them and think why it is so easy for them. When in reality they're going through the same things as me, but like when I look at it I'm like "they have it all together". They're so organized and I'm a madhouse. It drives me crazy.

Mentor teachers faced similar challenges with social media usage. Like teacher candidates, all mentor teachers do not allow students as followers on social media. However, students used alternative routes to attempt to gain access to the social media of mentor teachers. One mentor teacher reflected on an incident that occurred at the beginning of a school year:

The kids knew that my accounts were private, but they started going and like finding my husband's accounts and my husband's wasn't a private account. He didn't think it needed to be. So, then he just started having all of these 13-year-olds requesting him on social media because they knew he was my husband. So he had to make his accounts private as well. We have a colleague here whose son goes to another school and there are students who are friend requesting her son. They don't know him. They just know his mom. They friend our husbands, our parents, our children, just to have that little like snapshot I guess into our personal lives.

Mentor teachers reported they are careful about social media posts, as well as the accounts they interact with on social media. Engaging in disagreements on social media was also a challenge for some mentor teachers. One mentor teacher discussed how they decide what to post:

It's hard because the job is hard and sometimes you just want to complain, but you don't want people to snap back at you. So, you just kind of have to be like today was a rough

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day. And then for every rough day I post I try to make one that this was a really good day. So, it's a nice balance.

Another mentor teacher described their thought process when posting or engaging with other posts on social media. This mentor teacher elaborated:

Sometimes I'm wanting to vent. And I know I'm not alone. Or things don't go so well, and it's posted on social media, and you agree. But then I think OK, maybe I shouldn't voice it quite like that because then it's out there for everybody to see. That's been kind of hard and then I'm like alright, I don't need to be on here. I need to just turn it off and go do something else.

A mentor teacher described how they decide what will be considered interesting or helpful as a post, and what could be seen as inappropriate. This mentor teacher explained:

My boundaries have gotten even more strict as the years have gone on. It's always in my head now that I'm older. Be mindful of what you share or post. There are certain TikToks that I agree with but wouldn't share. It's not just about drinking. I can get really ramped up about politics. There are certain beliefs that I will say and share. But I won't share everything. I'm not going to say what I really, really want to say sometimes because it's best to just keep it within your text group and not for the world.

One mentor teacher reflected on their time as a young adult and a new teacher. They discussed how they have shifted their thoughts on social media and what is appropriate to post now they are an educator. This mentor teacher explained:

When I was graduating from college, I was at a birthday party, and I did a keg stand. I haven't done one since and it was the only one I've ever done. A friend posted a video of it to Facebook. I text her immediately and was like I'm trying to get a job, take that off

now. You know, that was a good lesson for me. I had just graduated from college. I was

21 years old and just stupid, but that was a great lesson. I thought I'm trying to get a job

and if someone sees that, and where we live, there are too many connections and if one

person sees it, everyone sees it. You have to be careful. You can post that you went to a

festival, but don't post the Uber ride home from the festival. I went through and deleted a

bunch of pictures after I was hired from college. No one wants to see me drinking beer in

a Princess Jasmine costume that was not flattering. No one wants to see me at the bar.

That was college life. It's over.

Another mentor teacher discussed challenges with how their school views social media and how

these views have affected what they share on social media. This mentor teacher replied:

You have to think about what you post if your administrator is going to see it. It's

supposed to be a First Amendment right to speech type of thing but anytime that we share

anything challenging or that we share any opinions that backfire, they're not really

supposed to, but they have come to me before and said you need to take that down.

Parents are going to see that. I remember the post specifically said, "Sometimes students

hurt you more than they realize with the things they say". Just saying talk to your kids

about how they speak to me. I've really been hurt and done home and like really thought

about it and reflected on it. And the admin came to me the next day and said, "take that

down".

Mentor teachers shared accounts of students using their likenesses to create parody and

spoof accounts. One mentor teacher had students create a social media profile in their likeness

using photos they were able to pull from Google from public accounts. They described the

situation and how they responded. This mentor teacher responded:

In my first year of teaching, which I feel like is notorious for people not liking you, I had two students make fake Instagram accounts about me. They had stolen my picture from a public account and made it the profile picture and like drawn devil horns on it or something dumb. They didn't post anything on it but made the account with my face on it and then went through and liked stuff on my public account from those fake accounts. It was my first year of teaching and I didn't let anyone follow me and I didn't follow anyone else. I guess they didn't like me because I was hard. I reported it, I blocked it, it went away. I know who did it and I ignored it and just moved on. I think it would have just fueled that fire of them wanting to assert their dominance or whatever.

Another mentor teacher described a political campaign parody video that was made and posted on YouTube using their photos and a voice-over to mock their accent. This mentor teacher explained:

A few years ago, there was somebody, a student that I've never even had in class, made a video imitating my voice and had my picture. I think a lot of people have seen it and I think they pulled that stuff all off social media. It really wasn't malicious, but you just have to avoid any scenario where it could be malicious. You can't make too big of a deal about it. If you do, then you just feed into it, I think.

Both teacher candidates and mentor teachers faced challenges when using social media. Teacher candidates and mentor teachers experienced situations with students seeking their social media accounts through a third party, such as a spouse or family member. Both groups felt this was due to student curiosity, boundaries they had set, and not allowing students to follow their social media accounts. Teacher candidates whose family members were also educators reported experiencing challenges with negative social media posts.

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Teacher candidates and mentor teachers also censored what they posted on social media, as well as posts they shared and responded to. Teacher candidates were careful to not share anything that could portray them as ill-equipped to take on a future teaching position. Teacher candidates were also careful to distinguish boundaries between their young adult life and their teaching life given the potential employers access to viewing their social media. Mentor teachers refrained from posts that could be perceived as negative or that poorly reflected on their teaching position, school, or classroom. Mentor teachers also reflected on past posts and how they viewed them differently now that they were educators.

Chapter Summary

The results of this study indicate that while there is some differentiation in how teacher candidates and mentor teachers approach various aspects of social media, there are clear examples of appropriate social media practices both groups identified. Participants were asked questions about their perceptions of responsible social media usage as well as best practices and challenges regarding their personal social media. Ensuring student safety and confidentiality when using technology, as well as promoting appropriate educational technology use was also explored.

Interview findings suggest that both pre-service and in-service educators understand the importance of privacy concerning their personal social media accounts. All participants utilized privacy settings and were careful who they allowed as followers on their social media accounts. Participants also agreed that students were not acceptable followers of any educator's social media account. While some in-service teachers did allow parents to follow their personal social media, they also explained that they maintained professionalism in all social media posts.

Respondents were vigilant reporting any inappropriate materials or cyberbullying. While most pre-service teachers had not been exposed to these issues, many in-service teachers discussed their procedures for reporting any use of technology that could be considered inappropriate, both in and out of the classroom.

Interview findings suggest that both pre-service and in-service educators understand the purpose of FERPA and how it applies to electronic student records. While pre-service teachers had little experience of student record transmission within a school system, they were aware of the importance of confidentiality when using student work or images in university work submissions. In-service teachers were diligent in protecting student confidentiality and used several systems to ensure that, including One Drive, One Note, and password-protected files.

Interviewees promoted technological applications in the classroom in several ways. Pre-service teachers were more apt to gain information from social media and share this information with colleagues and students. While some in-service teachers also shared innovative uses of classroom technology found on social media, others gained this knowledge through state and county initiatives.

Best practices for educators regarding social media usage were identified. Privacy and security settings were the most often mentioned best practices among both groups. All respondents stated that accounts should be set to private, and followers are permitted should be monitored. All respondents were clear that no educator should allow a student to follow their social media account. Other best practices included being selective in what you post to your social media account.

Challenges among both groups were also identified. These challenges included students seeking out social media accounts of the educator, as well as those associated with them,

including family members or significant others. Parents using social media to contact educators was also identified as a challenge by both pre-service and in-service teachers. Pre-service teachers discussed the difficulty of separating their personal lives as young adults from their professional persona. This included political and social beliefs. Having an awareness of the tone of social media posts was also a challenge for educators. Many described situations where the tone of the post was misinterpreted or misconstrued.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This study sought to identify the perspectives of both pre-service and in-service educators regarding appropriate social media practices. This chapter provides the problem statement, research questions, a summary of the research methods, and a summary of the findings. Study conclusions and recommendations for further research are also included.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The availability and use of social media continues to grow exponentially in our personal and professional lives. Employers struggle to develop and maintain usage policies that provide appropriate guidance and remain consistent with the advances in social media platforms. These issues have been especially challenging for employers and teachers in the P-12 educational environment. Annually, scores of teachers are terminated, resign, or are disciplined for inappropriate use of social media. Educator preparation programs have a responsibility to ensure their graduates understand and apply appropriate social media use practices. Several professional organizations, including the NASDTEC, have developed, and promulgated standards to guide responsible and ethical use of technology by educators. Currently, there is little available evidence documenting the level of preservice and in-service teacher understanding of appropriate social media practices. Therefore, using NASDTEC's Principle V: Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology as a framework, the purpose of this study is to investigate levels of understanding relative to the appropriate use of social media practices by preservice and in-service teachers. Secondarily, the study seeks to develop a catalog of best practices for social media use by preservice and in-service teachers.

Research questions guiding the study include:

1. To what extent do preservice and in-service educators understand the responsible use of social media/technology?

2. To what extent do preservice and in-service teacher educators understand how to ensure student safety and well-being when using social media/technology?

3. To what extent do preservice and in-service teacher educators understand how to ensure confidentiality in the use of social media/technology?

4. To what extent do preservice and in-service teacher educators understand how to promote the appropriate use of social media/technology in educational settings?

5. What are the differences based on selected demographic/attribute variables, if any, in preservice and in-service teacher education to appropriately use social media/technology in educational settings?

6. What best practices do preservice and in-service teachers recommend ensuring that social media is used responsibly and safely?

7. What are the major challenges faced by preservice and in-service teachers in using social media?

Research Design

A phenomenological design was used to examine preservice and in-service teachers understanding of appropriate social media practices inside and outside of the classroom. Phenomenological research focuses on inquiry that stems from the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This design involves conducting interviews with those participants to reflect these common shared experiences. A

phenomenological design is the best choice for this study because it allows the researcher to identify common themes within the sample of both preservice and practicing educators.

Data Collection

Interviews using a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used to collect data from current teacher candidates and mentor teachers in the College of Education and Professional Development at Marshall University. These in-depth interviews all both preservice and in-service teachers an opportunity to share their perspectives and personal experiences of using technology and social media. The interviews (N=24) were conducted, recorded, and transcribed via Microsoft Teams. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each.

Summary of Findings

Analysis of the interview data found both pre-service and in-service educators were diligent in protecting their privacy on social media platforms. Both groups ensured privacy settings were in place and were selective in who followed their social media accounts. Pre-service teachers were more likely to use social media and other types of technology to stay abreast of current trends, while in-service teachers were more likely to follow the guidance provided in their state and county training sessions. Several in-service teachers were administrators on professional accounts or had their own professional social media accounts.

In-service teachers had more experience in identifying and addressing inappropriate use of technology or cyberbullying in the classroom. Pre-service teachers were clear that if this issue was presented, they would address it. The few who had experience in these situations deferred to their mentor teacher for advice and support.

Both pre-service and in-service teachers employed multiple strategies to advocate for equal technology access for all students. School systems provided take-home hotspots for areas without internet access and provided access at various points throughout the district. One-to-one technology was available for the students of all pre-service and in-service teachers interviewed. Many allowed students to complete assignments using paper and pencil, or ensured students downloaded the assignments to their devices, if they did not have proper internet access.

Best practices identified for educator social media usage included ensuring privacy settings were in use. All interviewees agreed that educators should never allow students to follow their social media accounts. Being mindful of what you post is another best practice identified.

Several challenges were identified for educators using social media. One challenge included students reaching out to family members in an attempt to access the teacher's social media account. Another challenge was carefully wording posts to ensure they were not misinterpreted or taken out of context. A final challenge noted was comparing oneself, and in turn feeling inferior, to other educators on social media.

Conclusions

Findings from this study were sufficient to support the following conclusions:

To what extent do preservice and in-service educators understand the responsible use of social media/technology?

Both preservice and in-service educators demonstrate understanding regarding the responsible use of social media and technology. Preservice teachers adhere to their university and college social media and acceptable use of technology policies. In-service educators abide by state and local school systems acceptable use policies. Preservice and in-service educators maintain privacy settings on social media accounts and ensure only those they approve are

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granted access. Preservice teachers gain information regarding technology use from social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. In-service teachers are informed of ways to use technology in their classrooms through county and state professional development sessions and social media platforms.

To what extent do preservice and in-service teacher educators understand how to ensure student safety and well-being when using social media/technology?

Preservice teachers demonstrate an understanding of ensuring student safety and well-being when using social media and technology. Their lack of experience, however, makes them apprehensive to report this directly to the administration. Preservice teachers lean on the expertise of mentor teachers when dealing with such issues. In-service teachers understand and demonstrate knowledge to ensure student safety and well-being when using social media and technology. Preservice teachers have little or no experience with cyberbullying issues, while in-service educators routinely identify and report issues of cyberbullying. Preservice and in-service educators respect the privacy of their students and do not seek them out on social media.

To what extent do preservice and in-service teacher educators understand how to ensure confidentiality in the use of social media/technology?

Preservice and in-service teachers demonstrate knowledge and understanding regarding student confidentiality when using social media and technology. Both preservice and in-service teachers display an understanding of FERPA. Educators are trained on FERPA expectations each school year. In-service teachers develop methods within their school and county to ensure student confidentiality is protected, including the use of file-sharing software. In-service teachers access and use the West Virginia Department of Education's WVEIS platform for private student information. This platform is used for both student demographic information as well as special

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education documentation. School and county communication platforms, like Schoology, are used by in-service teachers to share student information with parents, other teachers, and administrators.

Preservice teachers use university-issued email addresses and in-service teachers use WVDE-issued email addresses for all electronic communication. Educators use separate personal and professional devices to ensure student information remains safe. Student names and identifying information are redacted from documents and students are identified using a specific number or initials.

To what extent do preservice and in-service teacher educators understand how to promote the appropriate use of social media/technology in educational settings?

Students in West Virginia schools have 1-to-1 technology access (Shaver, 2021). Some devices are only used at school, while other teachers allow students to take devices home. The lack of proper Wi-Fi access limits how technology is used in classrooms. Preservice teachers are careful to develop lessons using technology only if it is accessible to all students. In-service educators ensure students can access and download files needed to complete classroom assignments. Preservice and in-service teachers provide paper copies of assignments for students without Wi-Fi access. In-service educators provided information regarding reduced-cost internet access and hot spots for home use to students without Wi-Fi. County-mandated technology programs were difficult to navigate in classrooms due to lost or damaged technology.

Preservice educators collaborate with other teacher candidates and mentor teachers and use this experience to guide their lesson plans using technology applications. In-service teachers routinely request student accessible applications be added to school and county platforms. Professional development sessions and PLC meetings provide opportunities for both preservice

and in-service teachers to share new technology with colleagues. Ensuring students understand basic operating procedures is critical. Applications that are easy to use and access are essential.

What are the differences based on selected demographic/attribute variables, if any, in preservice and in-service teacher education to appropriately use social media/technology in educational settings?

Pre-service educators do not typically have separate personal and professional social media accounts. In-service educators sometimes serve as administrators on school social media platforms and maintain separate professional accounts at times. In-service educators who are younger than 40 are more likely to use social media to obtain information about technology. Those in-service teachers 40 and older gain information from county and state professional development.

In-service teachers who teach at middle school or high school are more likely to experience issues with inappropriate technology use and cyberbullying. In-service teachers in elementary classrooms are more likely to keep technology in the classroom, while those in secondary schools are more likely to allow students to possess this technology outside of the classroom.

Preservice and in-service educators do not allow students to follow their social media platforms. Preservice teachers and in-service teachers aged 30 and younger are more likely to experience students seeking out their social media platforms or the social media platforms of spouses and children. Male in-service teachers are more likely to allow parents to access their personal social media than female in-service teachers. Race was not a factor in the study findings.

What best practices do preservice and in-service teachers recommend ensuring that social media is used responsibly and safely?

Best practices for preservice and in-service educators were identified. The first, and arguably the most important, is that all social media platforms should be set to private. Doing so ensures students and parents cannot access educator social media accounts. Selectivity identifying followers is also a best practice. Being selective ensures that parents, as well as employers, do not have access to private and personal social media posts unless permitted. Setting clear boundaries with both students and parents is critical.

Ensuring that social media posts are positive and do not include profanity or alcohol use is also considered a best practice for educators. Preservice and in-service teachers should not share any negative feelings or information, especially about their school or profession, on social media. Safeguarding yourself from posts being taken out of context is essential. Giving additional thought prior to making a post is key.

Even though the use of alcohol or profanity is not illegal, it is considered inappropriate for social media by preservice and in-service teachers. Teachers are considered role models. Choosing to keep these acts private allows educators to maintain professionalism.

What are the major challenges faced by preservice and in-service teachers in using social media?

Educators face several challenges when using social media. The curiosity of students and parents is a challenge in maintaining boundaries for preservice and in-service teachers. Both students and parents will attempt to follow teacher social media accounts, or the accounts of their families. Preservice teachers whose parents are educators experienced additional challenges, such as parents and community members attempting to contact them on social media to reach

their parents. These preservice educators were also affected by social media posts made about their parents.

As young adults, preservice educators find the separation of their personal and professional lives a challenge. These challenges include using profanity, drinking alcohol, or sharing political or religious beliefs. Preservice teachers also have difficulties separating their personal experiences in the classroom and those of their fellow teacher candidates. Feelings of inferiority can develop from this lack of separation.

Preservice and in-service teachers find deciding what to post and what posts to share and interact with presents challenges. Mentor teachers reported they are more careful now than in the past regarding social media posts that include behavior that could be viewed as unacceptable. Many mentor teachers delete posts or photos from the past because they do not reflect their current beliefs.

Discussion and Implications

The literature review for this study highlighted the difficulties preservice and in-service educators face navigating personal social media use. Participants were limited to pre-service teachers nearing graduation and current and mentor teachers at MU COEPD, limiting the number of participants. Regardless of this limitation, the study provides insights and experiences of pre-service teachers as well as currently employed veteran teachers. The following section provides a discussion of the study findings and implications when compared to the literature review.

Acceptable Use Policies and the First Amendment

The literature review emphasized the disconnect between school system acceptable use policies and the educator's personal use of social media. As the literature review reflected, preservice and in-service educators found the lack of guidance when using personal social media

difficult (Reynard, 2013). While interviewees demonstrated an understanding of what would be considered poor judgment regarding social media, they did not demonstrate a clear understanding of what the acceptable use policy entails. Acceptable use policies are expected to be reviewed and signed annually by teachers, students, and staff in West Virginia. Policy regarding this expectation, however, was last reviewed in 2018 at the legislative level (West Virginia Department of Education, 2018). While the policy provides recommendations for school systems, there are no strict and specific guidelines regarding educators and social media.

Many acceptable use policies address the expectations of both teachers and students. (Akiti, 2012). By including students in these expectations, teachers are better equipped to maintain boundaries with both parents and students on social media platforms. When asked about social media followers, many interviewees referred to their acceptable use policies and that they believed such relationships were not allowed, but as previously stated, there was no clear protocol. While students still attempted to follow interviewees on social media, no respondent allowed them to do so.

While interviewees demonstrated somewhat of an understanding of the acceptable use policy they are expected to uphold, there was little understanding of where the acceptable use policy originated or who was responsible for ensuring it was followed. As the literature reflects (Reynard, 2013), teachers struggled with the understanding of whether the acceptable use policy should be considered a guideline or expectation.

While many school systems implement acceptable use policies, they do not always include protocols for using social media in and out of the classroom. Those educators interviewed were not given guidance regarding personal social media. Teachers interviewed used their best judgment in both who they accepted as followers and what they posted. All pre-service

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teachers interviewed stated they would not allow students or parents to follow their social media accounts. In-service teachers were more flexible in allowing parents but were still selective in who their followers were. Participants maintained privacy settings to ensure they controlled who viewed or commented on their social media pages. While acceptable use policies are created at the discretion of the local school system with guidance from the West Virginia Department of Education, more explicit statewide expectations should be established. Input from current educators is necessary to ensure these policies meet the needs of all involved, including teachers, students, parents, and administrators.

Another concept that is not always clear to educators is their protection under freedom of speech regarding social media posts. Since *Pickering v. Board of Education* (1968), the understanding of what is public concern and protected by the First Amendment has become more defined. Those interviewed demonstrated somewhat of an understanding of what types of posts would be protected by the First Amendment and those that would be in violation. Interviewees were careful to maintain professional boundaries when posting. Those posts that can be taken out of context or misinterpreted were also discussed, as teachers had been reprimanded in such instances. Educators understood ensuring that your language is positive and supportive of the school and community was key in maintaining posts that were protected by the First Amendment.

While the First Amendment protects freedom of speech, teachers understand there is a fine line between distasteful and illegal. Both pre-service and in-service educators felt it was important to separate their political views from their social media, especially if they allowed parents to be followers. This included refraining from posts regarding the school system and upcoming elections that will affect funding. Pre-service educators were especially careful not to

post photos or content that could be deemed unprofessional, as they were not hired in a teaching position yet. Participants mentioned that personal social media accounts should be treated as something anyone could access, whether they had permission or not. Being selective with social media posts and keeping thoughts private were deemed essential by educators interviewed.

Technology Professional Development

Reflective of previous research, educators are utilizing social media as a form of professional development and support (Prestridge, 2018). Both preservice and in-service teachers looked to social media as a means of professional development and support. Interviewees mentioned using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok to seek out new teaching methods, support content and instruction, and discover new ways to implement technology into the classroom.

Pre-service teachers were more apt to seek out information using social media platforms than veteran teachers. As previous research affirms, digitally native educators are more comfortable using social media as a means of seeking new information and implementing technology (Szeto et al., 2016). Interviewees discussed sharing new technology or techniques with mentor teachers and utilizing these new methods in the classroom. While they are still receiving guidance and support through the university, those interviewed were also engaging in self-paced professional development to be better equipped for the classroom. As previous research suggests, preservice teachers are more interested in seeking out support through social media groups than in person (Carpenter et al., 2023).

In-service teachers used platforms such as Pinterest, Facebook groups, and Teachers Pay Teachers to support their lessons and provide resources. Using these types of platforms allowed in-service teachers flexibility, providing finished products they could implement into already

established lessons (Torphy et al., 2020). This also allowed these veteran teachers a sense of anonymity when unsure of material or technique. Many interviewees mentioned gaining information and skills regarding technology use from their teacher candidates or the students in their classrooms. Those in-service respondents were more comfortable implementing new technology into their classroom than those who relied solely on district-level training and support.

March 2020 brought about challenges that many educators could not fathom when schools were closed, and learning was shifted to online instruction. This shift, however, allowed teachers to experience more flexible professional development options. Interviewees discussed the use of self-paced platforms for many professional development sessions, including annual safe schools training. However, many veteran teachers interviewed did not seek out their own professional development and instead relied on in-person training provided by their local school system. Because these training courses are only offered periodically, teachers are not receiving the most up-to-date professional development. Establishing an online module system for teacher professional development would ensure that educators are receiving the most up-to-date information and resources.

Professional Social Media Accounts

Only one teacher interviewed had a separate professional educator social media account focused on teaching. Previous research reflects that educators experience difficulty with students and parents seeking out their personal social media accounts (Chang, 2016). By establishing a separate professional social media platform, this educator stated they did not experience those issues. The only information posted on this platform were activities and assignments presented in

class, along with interesting facts about West Virginia history. Providing this account to parents, this interviewee believed kept them from seeking him out through other platforms.

Half of the veteran teachers interviewed allowed parents to follow their personal social media and contact them via these platforms. They did, however, discuss the difficulties in setting these boundaries. Encouraging teachers to create separate professional accounts for parents and students to follow is a beneficial way to encourage boundaries for personal social media. Doing so would allow parents and students a view of what is taking place in the classroom while discouraging parents from contacting parents on personal social media platforms. Some teachers felt that allowing parents to follow their social media accounts was not harmful and somewhat necessary, especially if the teacher was a club sponsor or coach. They were quick to reiterate that they are careful of what is shared and posted on their social media due to allowing this.

Several interviewees created separate social media accounts for interests outside of teaching, including part-time jobs to supplement their income. According to previous research (Davis & Yi, 2022), teachers use social media accounts to connect with followers on personal ideology and topics, and also for paid promotions. Teachers who use social media for these purposes must have parameters to ensure these secondary social media platforms are still considered appropriate by school systems.

Clear Social Media Guidelines

As previous research suggests, educators are often unclear about rules and expectations of personal social media due to a lack of explicit guidelines (Rodesiler, 2016). To ensure teachers maintain professionalism on personal social media, school systems must develop clear policies regarding what is considered appropriate and what would be considered unacceptable. These policies should include written and oral communication, as well as privacy settings and

communication with parents and students. Ensuring that all teachers are aware of and abide by these guidelines will ensure the safety of both the students as well as the educators. Clear expectations will ensure that all students and parents receive the same support from the school level and create less animosity should some teachers allow parents as followers on social media while others do not.

Best Practices for Educators

The best practices for educators regarding social media usage were developed through the responses of the educators interviewed but are also reflective of previous research. Maintaining privacy boundaries was deemed as a best practice for educators regarding their social media usage among interviewees. Keeping platforms secure through privacy settings was essential for all participants interviewed. Understanding that even marking your account as private is not 100% failsafe is also important. Interviewees understood that just because their account is private and their followers list selective, information published on social media can potentially make its way to public view.

The selectivity of who followed personal social media platforms was also found to be a key factor to ensure educators social media did not fall into the wrong hands. Most educators interviewed did not allow parents to follow their social media accounts, and all interviewees kept social media accounts private from student followers.

The separation of devices as well as servers was also important to this security. School-issued devices and internet platforms were not used to log into personal social media accounts. Using only school-issued platforms, like Schoology, to communicate with parents and students was also deemed a best practice. Enforcing this boundary with parent communication ensured

that correspondence was protected and confidential. This also created a record of correspondence between the teacher and parent.

Challenges for Educators

Those challenges identified by interviewees were reflective of previous research (Crockett et al., 2023; Greenhow et al., 2020). Challenges educators experienced using personal social media included the lack of separation by students. Students had a difficult time understanding that while it was not appropriate to request to follow their teacher on social media, it was equally inappropriate to request to follow the teacher's family member. Ensuring that personal lives remained private was difficult, but essential, for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Other challenges that educators experienced included selecting what to post or what other posts to interact with on social media. Several educators discussed sharing from other posts and how that could also reflect negatively and must be carefully considered. Both pre-service and in-service teachers mentioned deleting old posts and photos, as they did not fully agree with those statements now or felt that the photos could be seen as unflattering.

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Administrative and Leadership Implications

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The following are implications for those in university and school-level administrative roles regarding appropriate social media usage for educators.

Acceptable Use Policy Review

Previous research reflects a disconnect between acceptable use policies and teacher understanding. Those interviewed understood an acceptable use policy was in place regarding their technology use but had little understanding of what it specifically expected or entailed. Ensuring that educators have a clear understanding of what the acceptable use policy outlines is

the first step in maintaining professional boundaries with technology and social media usage. Encouraging teachers to provide input when this policy is developed or reviewed is important. Providing an ownership opportunity to teachers during the development process will ensure they understand and support the expectations (Rodesiler, 2016). Once this is established, it must be reviewed and adjusted annually to meet the needs of all involved. An annual review of the acceptable use policy, along with support throughout the school year, will ensure it is obeyed.

Professional Development and Support

In the past, teacher professional development was limited to in-person training. In the post-Covid era, using online platforms for this type of support is more common and more accessible to educators (Prestridge, 2018). Research on educator professional development states teachers find professional learning in online communities more appealing due to flexibility and accessibility. Administrators now have the opportunity to provide ongoing, self-paced professional development to teachers. By establishing a professional development portal containing training modules on various topics, teachers will have a catalog of professional development and support to choose from. An online professional development platform ensures that teachers can seek out topics that they need support as well as ensure that all teachers receive essential and required training.

Social Media Policy Development

While acceptable use policies spell out how technology should be used in the classroom by teachers and students, very few of these policies include specific guidelines for social media usage. This lack of guidance causes confusion and can lead to reprimand or termination. Through previous research, important concepts were identified as necessary when creating a social media policy for teachers (Warnick et al., 2016).

The concepts included in previous research that should be addressed when creating a social media policy include the use of professional language and judgment, refraining from engaging in reckless behavior like alcohol and drug use, and avoiding communication with students on social media. With the input of other educators, administrators, and university leadership should use these concepts to drive the creation of a social media policy for their employees and students. Having clear guidelines of what is considered appropriate and inappropriate behavior concerning social media will ensure all teachers and teacher candidates are held accountable and to the same standards. Repercussions for not abiding by these guidelines must also be included.

Recommendations for Additional Research

Recommendations for additional research include:

- Repeating this study with another university's student teacher and mentor teacher population. Since all universities and school systems operate differently and have different expectations, this could influence how other pre-service and in-service teachers view personal social media use.

- This study had a limited number of participants in each teaching content area. Further research analyzing the differences between elementary teachers and secondary teachers could be useful.

- Repeating this study with the same group of participants in one year could be useful. The once pre-service teachers who are now in-service teachers may provide a different insight than previously reported.

Concluding Statement

In conclusion, the study findings document the need for clarity regarding educators and personal social media. Using common sense and previous experiences, both pre-service and in-service teachers understand the importance of separating personal social media from classroom students, and often parents, however, there are no defined rules directing them to do so.

Pre-service and in-service teachers demonstrate responsible use of personal social media and technology, adhering to acceptable use policies enforced by their respective universities and school systems. Both parties understand the importance of maintaining privacy settings on social media and discernment when accepting followers. Pre-service teachers are more likely to use social media to gain information and support to use technology, while in-service teachers rely heavily on county and state-provided professional development.

Student safety while using technology is important to pre-service and in-service teachers. In-service teachers show more experience identifying incidents of cyberbullying and inappropriate technology use and were more apt to report these. Lack of experience can cause a pre-service teacher to avoid these altercations, and instead rely on their mentor teacher for support.

Student confidentiality is essential. Both pre-service and in-service teachers understand the importance of maintaining student confidentiality when using technology and social media. Through training and support, educators understand the importance of FERPA and all that it encompasses. Other methods to keep student information confidential include file-sharing software, WVDE-maintained platforms, and county and school platforms. The use of county-issued technology devices and state-issued email addresses also adds another layer of safety regarding confidentiality.

Educators are careful to ensure that all students are equipped with the tools to be successful. All students in WV are provided with 1-to-1 technology. Due to lack of internet access in rural areas of West Virginia, county issued hotspots and wireless stations for students to access are essential. Both pre-service and in-service teachers are aware of students who may not be able to complete assignments due to lack of services, and therefore provide paper options.

Through the research, best practices for educators regarding social media usage were identified. Ensuring that social media platforms have privacy settings activated is essential. Establishing boundaries between both students and parents is crucial. Students must understand that it is inappropriate to follow you are their teacher, as well as any of your immediate family members. Parents must honor these boundaries to ensure that the teacher-student relationship is professional and not personal.

Editing social media posts to ensure they do not include any language or images that could be deemed inappropriate is also crucial. Teachers must maintain professionalism in both social media posts and photos, avoiding any topics that could be considered taboo or taken out of context. Maintaining professionalism, even on personal social media, is considered a best practice.

The inability of students and parents to honor the above-referenced boundaries is one of the biggest challenges educators face when using social media. Maintaining a professional and personal separation is challenging, but important.

Selectivity in posts, as well as interacting with other social media sites, also creates challenges for educators. Pre-service teachers want to be taken seriously and must maintain professional behavior on social media. Interacting with sites that could be deemed unfavorable is also a challenge for educators. Being aware of what you post, or share is crucial.

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Appendix A: Approval Letter from the Office of Research Integrity

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY®
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Office of Research Integrity   FWA 00002704
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive   IRB1 #00002205
Huntington, WV 25755   IRB2 #00003206

May 22, 2023

Ronald Childress, Ed.D.
Leadership Studies Department, COEPD

RE: IRBNet ID# 2054272-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Childress:

Protocol Title:	[2054272-1] Educator Perceptions of Appropriate Social Media Practices
Site Location:	MUGC
Submission Type:	New Project APPROVED
Review Type:	Exempt Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.104(d)(2), the above study was granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee. No further submission (or closure) is required for an Exempt study **unless** there is an amendment to the study. All amendments must be submitted and approved by the IRB Chair/Designee.

This study is for student Amanda Preece.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Lindsey Taylor at (304) 696-6322 or l.taylor@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

Appendix B: Informed Consent for Participation

EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF APPROPRIATE SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES

Dear _____:

My name is Amanda Preece, and I am pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership from Marshall University. I currently serve as the assistant director of the Student Center of Professional Education Services, housed within the College of Education and Professional Development here at Marshall University, as well as an adjunct professor within our college. I am contacting you to request your participation in my dissertation research study focusing on educator perceptions of appropriate social media practices, both professionally and personally. I have attached a study abstract.

I am specifically requesting your participation in a semi-structured interview. This interview will focus on the topic of social media usage and practices as an educator, both personally and professionally. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete and will be conducted either via video conferencing (Zoom, Teams) for convenience purposes or in person. Interviews will be recorded, and recordings will be destroyed following completion of interview transcription. Transcripts will be assigned a number, and the code list of names will be retained on a password-protected computer file by the Co-PI.

There are no known risks involved with participating in this study. Your willingness to be interviewed will imply both your consent and that you are at least 21 years of age. Participation is completely voluntary and there are no penalties or loss of benefits if you choose not to participate. You may also choose not to answer any questions included in the interview protocol. The information you supply is confidential, and no individual will be identified by name or identifying information.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Dr. Ron Childress (PI) at 304-545-0245 or rchildress@marshall.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at 304-696-4303.

Please reply to this email at your earliest convenience and let me know if you are willing and able to participate. If so, I will respond with suggested times and dates for our prospective interview.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to consider participating in this study. The success of this study is dependent upon the experiences and insights of professionals such as yourself. My expectation is that this project could guide educator preparation programs and county school systems as they navigate acceptable use policies for educators. A summary of the study's findings will be shared with all participants.

Amanda Preece, Co-Investigator
304-638-9060
Amanda.preece@marshall.edu

Appendix C: Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol
Educator Perceptions of Appropriate Social Media Practices

Name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This research is being conducted through the Marshall University College of Education and Professional Development (MUCOEPD) to explore the perceptions of preservice and in-service educators regarding appropriate social media practices. This interview will be recorded for the sole use of the co-investigator's analysis. The information you provide will be incorporated with that of other interviewees. Confidentiality will always be maintained. Participation is completely voluntary, and you can choose to stop participation at any time.

Did you read the consent form and study abstract? Do you have any questions about the purpose of the study? Are you willing to continue with the interview?

As either a preservice teacher enrolled in an educator preparatory program or an in-service educator currently practicing, your experiences will add a great deal of insight to the data being collected for this study. I anticipate this interview will take 45-60 minutes.

General Demographics and Attributes
1. Gender
2. Race
3. Age Bracket: 21-29/30-39/40-59/59+
4. How would you describe your current educator position or title?
5. What other roles do you have aside from this position?
6. How long have you been an educator?
7. Could you briefly describe your background as an educator, including schools, grade levels, content?

Using technology in a responsible manner
1. Do you feel that you use social media responsibly, transparently, and primarily for purposes of teaching and learning per school and district policy?
2. How do you stay abreast of current trends and uses of school technology?
3. Do you understand and abide by the district's policy on the use of technology and communication?
4. Do you have separate professional and personal social media accounts? If so, how do you keep those accounts separate (mark accounts as private, friend requests, etc.)

Ensuring student safety and well-being when using technology

1. Do you believe you are vigilant in identifying, addressing, and reporting inappropriate and illegal materials/imagines in electronic or other forms? Do you have any examples of these types of reports?
2. Do you feel you respect the privacy of your students' social media presence unless given consent to view such information?
3. Do you believe you ensure student safety by monitoring and reporting information concerning possible cyberbullying incidents?

Maintaining confidentiality when using technology
1. What measures do you take to ensure student information and educational records are stored and transmitted confidentially?
2. Do you feel that you understand the intent of Federal Educational Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA) and how it applies to sharing electronic student records?

Promoting the appropriate use of technology in the education setting
1. How do you advocate for equal access to technology for all students, especially those historically underserved?
2. How do you promote the benefits of and clarify the limitations of various appropriate technological applications with colleagues, school personnel, parents, and community members?
3. How do you promote technological applications that are appropriate for students' individual needs, that students understand how to use, and that assist and enhance the teaching and learning process?

Best Practices for Educators

1. Are there any best practices regarding social media usage that you would recommend to other educators?
2. Why have you deemed these best practices in your experience?

Challenges for educators using social media

1. What challenges have you faced using social media as an educator?

In conclusion

1. Is there anyone else that you believe we should interview regarding this topic?
2. Do you have any final comments or thoughts you would like to add regarding any of the topics we have discussed today?

Appendix D: Curriculum Vitae

AMANDA H. PREECE

Marshall University

Leadership Studies

Amanda.preece@marshall.edu

Education

Marshall University

MA, Leadership Studies   **2013**

Concentration in Educational Leadership

Marshall University

BA, Elementary Education   **2004**

Concentration in Multi-Subject K-8 and Early Education

Licensures and Certification

Elementary Education, permanent certification, WVDE

Early Education, permanent certification, WVDE

Administrative Certification, PK-Adult, WVDE

Teaching Experience

Marshall University College of Education and Professional Development   2017-present

    EDF 201: Education Psychology and the Developing Learning

    EDF 475: Schools in a Diverse Society

    CI 342: Literature and Language Arts Methods

    CI 360: Social Studies Methods, Elementary

    ESS 305: Health and PE in Early Childhood Programs

    UNI 100: Freshman First Class

Professional Presentations

Eastern Education Research Association (EERA)   **2021, 2022**

Measuring Success by the Seeds We Plant-Robert Louis Stevenson: One Institution's Experience with Alumni Tracking

Marshall University Student Research and Creativity Symposium   **2022**

Measuring Success by the Seeds We Plant-Robert Louis Stevenson: One Institution's Experience with Alumni Tracking

West Virginia Reading Conference   **2022**

Anchor Charts for the Win!

Eastern Education Research Association (EERA)   **2023**

Comparison of Yearlong Residency and Traditional Student Teaching Models: A Case Study

West Virginia Reading Conference   **2023**

Gateway to Comprehension

Committees and Memberships

John Marshall Leadership Fellows

Phi Kappa Phi

College of Education and Professional Development, Faculty Recognition Committee

College of Education and Professional Development, Recruitment and Marketing Committee

College of Education and Professional Development, PDS Advisory Council

Marshall University Alumni Association, Huntington Chapter, secretary