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**UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:
A STUDY OF KERN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

By

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Abstract

Social media has permeated almost every aspect of the lives of anyone who utilizes the internet. Teachers and students are no exception. Students are most likely to use social media sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Twitter. This research focuses on best practices related to augmenting school curriculum to utilize these tools to increase student engagement which is critical in taking the education of school-age children to the next level. Some research shows that children today spend an inordinate amount of time, upwards of 40+ hours weekly, interacting with social media. Educators must embrace this new technology and find new ways to integrate social media into the classroom, because they will be more able to connect with children in a medium that they are utilizing daily; thus increasing their engagement. Although some problems such as digital divide and other limitations do exist, this cannot be a deterrent to utilizing this type of new technology.

Chapter I – Introduction

Section I: Background Regarding Social Media and Schools

Social media consumes the lives of school age children as well as adults. Look at almost any newspaper or news broadcast at present and there will be a story about social media. Websites like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and a host of others are making news constantly and are changing society daily. The everyday onslaught of these new forms of communications needs to be addressed in our educational system because students spend so much of their time utilizing them. Students are used to processing vast amounts of information and require stimulation far beyond what was required by teachers even a decade ago. These students can benefit from social media being integrated into the classroom but because some teachers are lagging in their own education of social media, this technology is not being implemented to its fullest potential to help educate students which is in fact, a teacher's job in the first place.

Students these days are inherently different from students in past decades. School systems, and the way that children are educated, have changed significantly to keep up with new teaching techniques and ever-evolving learning styles. In the current environment, computers, technology and social media dominate young peoples' world. According to Ziegler, many children today spend an inordinate amount of time looking into at least one, but sometimes multiple, computer screens at the same time. Some studies have shown that students today spend more time utilizing various forms of media than many people spend at work; approximately 44 hours weekly (Ziegler, 2007). Also, it is significant to note that some research has

shown that in 2008, more than 75% of internet users joined social networks, read or participated in blogs or contributed to online shopping reviews (Kaplan & Hearnlein, 2009). Furthermore, learning styles of students have changed significantly in the recent past and continue to evolve which is why social media as a topic becomes important in engaging students in their coursework.

The specific purpose of this research will be to understand social media in today's educational system, discover how it is currently being utilized, ascertain the limitations of social media in the didactic environment, and develop a best practices guide by finding ways that teachers have implemented social media into the educational setting. Many school districts and teachers associations have warned teachers about the evils of social media. These school boards and teachers associations, as well as the teachers themselves, will need to embrace this technology because it does not appear to be a passing fad, but a technology that is here to stay and will continue to evolve and shape the way that students and teachers interact. It is for this reason that this research, as well as further research into this topic, needs to be performed.

Section II: The Problem with Social Media and Education

Although several problems present themselves currently in the realm of education and social media independently and mutually, this research will primarily focus on social media implementation in the public educational sector and will focus on the mutual exclusivity of the topic. Many educational institutions simply do not have the manpower or focus to institute a social media policy which lays out a model of best practices or rules to follow which will properly shield the organization and

teachers from liability. Certainly, the issue of digital divide, the haves versus the have-nots technologically, must be addressed in any discussion regarding technology implementation and is likely the greatest challenge with implementing any type of technology. Some parents and children will be excluded from participating due to monetary or technological limitations including not being able to afford the proper equipment or not possessing the proper skills to utilize internet access on any level. In addition, there is not a singular piece of research for schools or educators to look to for suggestions about implementing social media, much less a policy guide for implementing a social media campaign. This will be the primary focus of this research.

Additionally, many school districts are not equipped to educate children about social media because the educators themselves may not possess the skills to utilize social media. Facebook started as a commercial enterprise in 2005 and is one of the most popular social networking sites in existence today with more than 500 million users worldwide as of July 2010 (Facebook.com, 2010). Even though Facebook is a commercial enterprise, the service it offers is free. Facebook is also relatively easy to use, requires minimal information to open an account, and user trust is high which facilitates interaction between users (Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini, 2007). This begs the question of how and where to procure training for teachers, what levels of training should teachers have with regards to this technology, and what is the best way to go about bringing this to the forefront of education. No matter who is involved in the decision making process, there is no question that the

issue must be addressed to ensure that children in the United States obtain a proper education and are well prepared to interact in the world today.

Section III: Methods and Procedures of this Research

To gather the data required for this research, this researcher will conduct interviews of professionals in the field of education. The interview process will include 3 teachers and 1 administrator from a middle school in Bakersfield, California; 3 teachers and 2 administrators, a principal and vice principal, at the high school level and a psychologist who specializes in children and teen counseling. By including a diverse population of professionals in the research, as well as utilizing techniques included in the phenomenographic approach and procedure, this researcher is confident that meaningful data can be obtained that will be useful to the study. Although the sample size is small ($n=10$), there is a plethora of research that suggests that small sample sizes of professionals can produce a wealth of accurate information (Fridlund, 1998; Dunn, 2001; Crouch & MaKenzie 2006; Elgan & Fridlund, 2009) Also, stratified sampling techniques can include sampling a certain group from a theoretical or empirical understanding of the topic to provide meaningful data to the researcher, especially when using interviews as the main, or only, form of data gathering (Barnett & Lentz, 1997; Dunn, 2001)

The sample size in this particular research is small because some constraints are put on the research. These constraints include convenience, time to complete the study, financial, and other delimitations that will be further developed in Chapter III. Further studies, ones that are provided more financial resources and time, might survey large groups of teachers and administrators throughout several or all states

or conduct face to face interviews on a larger scale to replicate or validate this study. This research is being conducted on the local level and will be representative of the local climate and culture of Bakersfield, California.

Section IV: Importance of Integrating Social Media in Schools

This research is important because children and adults are both being constantly exposed to all types of media and especially social media. These types of interactive Web 2.0 applications, which will be more fully described in Chapter II, are becoming the standard throughout the internet which is becoming more and more user generated content. Educators, administrators, and children alike must be educated about the proper ways to use this media and the interactivity of social media can be an asset or benefit to teachers because many students are already using this technology. Exercises in classrooms can also help students to think more critically about their activities outside the classroom (Williams, 2008).

This research is also significantly important because students today need to be engaged more in the classroom and they are conditioned to consume large amounts of media but not necessarily static text (Dretzin & Maggio, 2008). Instructors can no longer lecture and assign readings from a book and effectively keep a student's attention over the long term. Students now expect teachers to be more interactive and provide a dynamic learning environment. Teachers can incorporate lessons as independent learning activities of different lengths utilizing video clips, power point and other role-playing exercises that can be included in their social media campaign (Moody, 2010). An introduction to social media by teachers for students can combat the power and influence that media acculturation can have

on students later in life (Ziegler, 2007). Also, utilization of these types of technology is able to catch the attention of students, heighten interest in their studies and motivate them to perform better in their education (Ziegler, 2007).

Section V: Research Questions

Throughout this thesis, this researcher will attempt to find the answer to the main research questions which is, “Can social media be utilized in such a way as to increase student engagement by augmenting school curriculum?” It is through this focal question, and many sub-questions, that this thesis will take shape. Other questions abound within the topic including questions about best practices, limitations, and unintended consequences. In the end, these questions will be answered throughout this thesis.

Most people, and especially teachers, would agree that teaching is more than causing some activity to take place or assigning some specific activity (Ross & Frey, 2009). This research is important because as technological shifts become evident throughout society, learning styles of children change. Likewise, social media usage and best practices should be taught to students. This is a significant concept because, with these technological shifts, students who are not taught the proper way to utilize these technologies will be left behind and will likely not possess the skills required in today’s workforce. In addition, students must be taught the proper way to interact with information technology and social media especially to provide a good foundation of best practices for students (Ziegler, 2007). Freestone and Mitchell argue that the Internet enhances temptation and further, that the illegality of some unethical behaviors will worsen as usage increases due to the fact that there is more

opportunity and anonymity on the Internet (2004). This likely scenario is certainly enough of a reason to enhance the understanding of social media and information technology, especially for students who are vulnerable.

Some researchers would argue that teachers are required to utilize these new technologies because students today demand that educators meet their unconstrained expectations (Dale & Pymm, 2009). Other would argue that social media is not the proper venue for students to engage teachers and along with this line of thinking, there are myriad problems such as the appropriateness of students and teachers 'friending' each other¹, student and teacher access to social media, and the constantly evolving security issues with social media just to name a few.

No matter which side of the issue upon which interested parties may find themselves, social media is impacting the lives of students and this is not necessarily for the worse. Several studies have shown that collaborative work can result in a better outcome for all actors over and above what could be done by any individual (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). In a case study presented by Donna Ross and Nancy Frey, students were given a problem and through collaborative problem solving, were able to more deeply understand the problem and the solution than if they had gone about solving it alone (2009).

The focus of this research paper will be to further investigate the impact that social media will have as it is ultimately implemented in the classroom. This researcher will define social media, digital divide, roles of students and teachers and

¹ Friending refers to the practice in a social media environment that allows 2 or more people to become friends and share their information and updates to their statuses.

the learning environment and engagement of students and then assess what impact each has on the educational system.

Chapter II – Literature Review

This chapter will consist of the researcher highlighting the current state of the literature available regarding the implementation of social media in schools; specifically at the kindergarten through 12th grade levels. Although there is not much research regarding social media implementation with children prior to the college level, there are many factors that can be looked at concerning children and how social media will impact them at the middle and high school level. Role theory looks at how the relationships between teachers and students are flattened² by social media as well as other factors. When social media is implemented as an amendment to the curricula, there are implications that must be addressed such as the flattening of roles between educators and those they educate. Also, many other types of technology have already been integrated into school curricula such as Apple's ipod® and ipad®, mp3 players, laptops, and other technologies that can be compared to social media in a lateral sense. Five themes make themselves evident in this research project which includes importance, digital divide, best practices, theoretical implications, and limitations and delimitations. Each of these themes will be explored further throughout the chapter and the remainder of this thesis.

Section I – Current Research Regarding Social Media and Education

The current research on the topic of social media is sparse. Most likely this is due to the fact that social media is a relatively new technology and has not been in existence for a sufficient time to be studied. While there are many studies

² Flattening of roles refers to the equalization of the roles between students and teachers that can happen between students and teachers but especially in an online environment.

surrounding the topic of student learning styles, student engagement, role theory, specifically student and teacher roles, and social media, there have been no specific studies linking social media to learning and education of which this researcher is aware. Much of the research that will be used in this thesis will be specifically tied to role theory and the breakdown of the student teacher roles in an online environment. The change of learning styles of students over time, as well as some studies focused on media and its effects on children and students, will also be employed. With much of society utilizing computers and other information technologies in the household, as well as in the educational system, this research will be important in determining to what degree technology, and especially social media, can be integrated into the classroom. Although not specifically dealing with this study, future research might include the physiological and sociological impact of social media on health due to its proliferation of sedentary lifestyles and the many hours spent in front of a computer screen.

Although specific research regarding the integration of social media in the classroom is sparse, some research at the post-secondary level has been performed. This is likely due to ease of recruiting subjects by researchers and the fact that parental consent of those in college is usually not required, making survey and research on these subjects fairly convenient (Barnett & Lentz, 1997). Crispin Dale and John M. Pymm, in their article, *The iPod® as a Learning Technology*, argue that today's students have changed their learning styles because they have been dramatically influenced by technology and the technological shifts within contemporary society (2009). They go on to say that students think and process

information differently than in years past; likely due to these technological shifts. Students today need more interactive types of media to continually stimulate them in a learning environment. In the Public Broadcasting System's video *Growing Up Online*, the narrator says that children today need to have more interaction because they are accustomed to looking at multiple screens while listening to a lecture and emailing their friends all at the same time (Dretzin & Maggio, 2008). For these students, multitasking is the status quo and being forced to consult with a textbook that includes pictures does not meet their expectations; they require a more interactive approach. It is for this reason that this type of research, and other studies like it, needs to be performed.

This thesis will focus on a small part of the potential impact that social media will have on our children and our world. That is, how it can be integrated into the educational environment. Because social media is such a relatively new and burgeoning technology, there is much more research that should be done with regard to the student and teacher role and how it is influenced by social media, the limitations of social media in education as well as how best to implement a social media strategy in an educational setting, which will be the main purpose of this particular thesis.

Section II – Themes Surrounding Social Media in Education

Throughout the research, there are many themes associated with social media and education. The topic is fraught with complex issues because technology, and especially social media, will have major ramifications and impacts on the education of children as well as teachers in the educational system. Throughout the

literature, researchers seem to be intent on making the fact known that social media has already and will continue to change the way people interact, learn, and execute every aspect of their daily lives. Not only that it has affected us and will continue to affect us in ways that people cannot fathom, but that those who resist implementing social media will be left behind. Literature regarding the subject is divided into several themes which dominate the research. The overarching themes included in the literature on the topic of social networking in the classroom are fivefold and include the following;

- 1) Importance – There are many reasons that this topic is important including the fact that student engagement has changed, the way that students learn has changed and the amount of media to which children and teachers are exposed has dramatically increased in the last two decades. Not only are students exposed to more media than ever before, they are accustomed to processing an enormous amount of information daily (Dretzin & Maggio, 2008). Susan Zeigler, a researcher from Cleveland State University, points out that some would argue that these technological changes will likely result in radical changes to the educational system throughout the world (2007). This coupled with the fact that students are graduating from high schools with little formal instruction in a medium that takes up a significant portion of their personal and professional lives brings to light that education in social media needs to be implemented. Students must be taught appropriate ways of accessing social media, safe practices while online, as well as guidelines to what is appropriate in the online environment. Also, social media gives teachers a chance to engage students in a way that they already enjoy which has the potential for

extremely positive educational outcomes. But, this can only happen when students and teachers alike have a similar outlook when it comes to social media.

2) Digital Divide – Some teachers, students and parents have the technology as well as the skills required to utilize social networking while others may not have this technology or may not have the skills required to utilize the technology. This especially poses a problem when considering a social media campaign in the educational setting and considerations for access, particularly by students who must utilize technology for access to assignments, must be analyzed thoroughly. A copy of the internet usage by household and type of internet connection and state 2009, as well as internet access and usage 2009 is attached as appendix D;

3) Best Practices – Although social media is constantly changing and evolving, there are many school districts and even governmental agencies that have issued guidelines and best practices guides with regards to social media. Many of these school districts and governmental agencies have differing policies and opinions regarding the best practices of implementing a social media component to their organizations. School districts would likely benefit from a best practices guide for implementing social media into their curricula and for their staff;

4) Theoretical Implications – The theory behind student and teacher roles impact this research and specifically how these roles are changed, not only by the online learning environment, but by teachers and students becoming “friends” in a social networking situation. Other possible implications include opinions expressed about how this technology will evolve and how school districts should be involved and included on the cutting edge of this technological revolution to better engage

and educate students. This attitude is required because social networking has and will continue to change the way people act socially and relate to other people in person (Westlake, 2008). Social media can also endanger students and make the specific educational institution liable as in the case of a teacher who was terminated and booked on charges of lewd acts with a minor but still maintains his accounts and some of his former students as “friends” on the social networking site MySpace (Carter, Foulger & Ewbank, 2008). In this specific case, there are arguments that the school itself may be liable for the teacher’s actions, but there is currently no case law to support such arguments. It is no wonder when looking at these examples that school boards and associations, such as the Ohio Board of Education, which recommends that teachers not use Facebook at all, take such drastic measures such as warning against teachers utilizing social media in their personal lives (Associated Press, 2008); and

5) Limitations – Social media is a commercial enterprise and constantly changes which may pose several issues with regard to integration in the classroom. Because of this, schools may wish to integrate their own social media types of software into their school websites. Already, many teachers are using school websites to post grades and homework assignments which could be expanded to provide safe social networking for students as well as integrate classroom activities into these social networks.

The topic of the integration of social media is extremely important; especially when it is thought of in the educational context. As has been outlined in this thesis earlier, society at large is inundated with stories of how social media is affecting its

citizens' everyday lives. In these journal articles and news stories, social media has been called by several names such as user-generated content and user-created media and is often talked about in relation to web 2.0 (a term coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2004 which essentially identifies web applications that allows users to collaborate in a social context and share user generated content focusing on interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design and collaboration) and refers to many different technological, economic and social developments (Manovich, 2009; Sharma, 2008). These developments, or innovations, have driven the internet from a publishing platform which is primarily driven by professional web developers publishing content for a specific audience, to a user generated content platform where many non-professional users are constantly generating internet subject matter. As an example, Wikipedia.com is an on-line encyclopedia that is primarily user content driven and is so popular that it is now available in more than 200 languages all over the world (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Other examples of this popular type of content are Facebook, which has approximately 175 million active users (more than double the population of Germany); YouTube, which sees more than 10 hours of content uploaded to its site every minute; and Flickr which provides access to over 3 billion images (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). This explosive popularity of social media makes a strong case for the paramount importance of teaching proper usage of social media as well as other technological innovations.

When looking at the issue of integrating social media into an educational setting, one must be conscious of the digital divide. Digital divide refers to:

...in a global sense, the tremendous disparity in access to technology between the small minority of developed countries who are highly technological and the vast majority of developing nations that are technologically underdeveloped. This gap pertains to items such as personal computers and Internet access, but also includes simpler technologies like telephones. "Digital divide" was a term first used to refer to the disparity in access to computer technology between the rich on the one hand, and the poor and minority groups on the other, in the United States (University of Connecticut, 2010).

Bringing this definition to a more local level, this researcher would define digital divide as being the disparity in access to technology between those who have access to technology, and know how to efficiently utilize it, and those that either do not have access to technology or who do have access but do not possess the proper skills to utilize the technology. According to 2009 estimates from the United States Census Bureau, almost one fourth of American households do not have internet access. According to the United States Department of Commerce's current populations survey conducted in 2009, children aged 10-17 years represent approximately 31 million people and of those, almost 7 million do not have access to the internet at all. In the context of this research, technology refers to computers with internet access and mobile devices that have the potential to grant access to the internet and especially social media. Interestingly, according to the World Summit on the Information Society, in America, "...the cost of Internet broadband is lowest in the United States [versus other countries]" which results in higher levels of

integration in society (International Telecommunications Union, 2009).

Nevertheless, teaching children about social media is important because they will be dealing with similar issues throughout their lives.

As has been stated earlier, digital divide occurs for a number of reasons. The first reason primarily includes economic factors because some families, especially those in low income areas, may not be able to afford computer equipment or sufficient access such as broadband technology. Educational factors can also come into play because some people may be able to afford computers or mobile equipment and internet that are sufficiently advanced to grant access, but do not possess the requisite skills required to utilize the access efficiently or in a manner that derives the desired result. Still others may have the financial means and skills to utilize the equipment, but not the required infrastructure from companies that provide services such as broadband internet access; this might include people in rural areas. There are many different avenues through which this single problem may be solved. For instance, providing free broadband access to residents of a residential area may be a solution to one of these problems as is issuing computers to school age children. Topics such as these provide opportunities for further research in this area, as well as many more questions to be answered, but are beyond the scope of this thesis.

The third theme that is apparent in the research is the best practices for schools that are already implementing social media into their curriculum. Many schools currently have some type of online system available for parents to check homework assignments and grades of their children which is a promising start.

Some schools are already utilizing some form of social media whether it is an internal network contained on school servers or utilizing a commercial service such as Facebook or Moodle and even the iPod is being used as a learning technology (Dale & Pymm, 2009). In these cases, and especially because social media is such a new and evolving technology, educators need a best practices guide as a way to be consistent and avoid the pitfalls that can accompany the utilization of social media with teachers and students. Although this is not an exhaustive list, some of the most widely recognized best practices of implementing social media are as follows;

1. Make social media accessible to all students and teach them how to use social media responsibly;
2. Provide a safe haven for students to work in groups collaboratively using social media;
3. Utilize mobile technology such as iPod podcasts and mobile phones to increase student engagement; and
4. Provide more interactive content in classrooms to engage students' ability to consume massive amounts of media.

Later in Chapter IV this research will give a more detailed list of best practices that are currently being utilized at the classroom level and some ideas for improvement.

There are also some negative aspects of utilizing social media in education. Pitfalls of social media use between students and teachers are numerous, so copious in fact that some school districts have warned teachers to be careful about

what content that they generate on social media sites (Kist, 2008). Some of these disadvantages include, but are not limited to the following;

1. The theory of roles and the adjustments, or flattening, that happen when students and teachers “friend” each other. This flattening becomes especially evident when students and teachers are put into an immersion learning environment where teachers and students are performing similar tasks and the roles become flattened or similar to one another (Warner & Esposito, 2009);
2. When children utilize social media in a classroom setting, the content that they generate must be monitored. Inadvertent comments by students could end a teacher’s career (Kist, 2008);
3. Because of many issues with social media, such as the digital divide, social media integration in the classroom may need to be flexible and easily changed to augment the curriculum as an optional component rather than as a required part of the learning environment.

These issues are certainly evident when it comes to the surface of the question of a best practices model of integrating social media into the classroom learning environment. But, because this technology is evolving and ever-changing, there are also implications that are merely theoretical at this point in time. Some of these implications would include the integration of rules that are flexible enough to change with the demands of the social media policy while at the same time being stringent enough to regulate social media the way in which it should. Also, as some sites in the classroom are blocked with filtering software to keep children safe online,

some social media will be inadvertently blocked as well which will limit the learning experience of children in the classroom. Teachers will have to take the lead on teaching children about the proper use of social media and the internet while at the same time adhering to a policy that has been put into place by a school district which is usually not noticeably flexible in making decisions. This situation is very much like journalists who mine social networking sites for information about people. Their best practices model is to be transparent, up front, and honest as to their identity being a representative of an organization seeking information (Podger, 2009). In this case, it is likely that transparency is the key to policy implementation with regard to social media in the classroom because parents, teachers, and other stakeholders will be expected to be able to monitor their children's usage. Certainly, these situations represent the main implications that researchers have considered but many more will probably surface as this technology and social media are integrated to larger degree throughout many different school systems. However, it is important for educational institutions to develop rules and educational outcomes concerning social media as children must learn these skills and not be relegated to simply using books to gather their information.

Section III – The Teacher/Student Role and Social Media

In looking at social media and the theory associated with roles that are commonly played out with regard to the student and teachers, social media can have a flattening effect and can be both positive at times, and negative in some respects. According to the Dictionary of Psychology, a role is, "...the set of behaviors expected of a person possessing a certain social status" (Corsini, 2002).

Typically, group members identify their roles and follow established functional roles in group activities concerning learning and knowledge-related activities (Yeh, 2010). The Yeh study analyzed several different learning behaviors and identified 13 different roles that people, both students and teachers, involved in online learning communities played. During this particular study, students were in many cases more likely to construct a positive experience when utilizing these online learning communities. Roles of the students and teachers were effectively flattened and resembled a more equalized type of relationship between each class of those involved. This is similar to other experiences offline when students and teachers cohabitate in a program where they are both working together to achieve a common goal. This type of program is called immersion service-learning (Warner & Esposito, 2009).

Beth Warner and Judith Esposito of Elon University conducted research involving immersion service-learning courses where students and teachers lived in the same quarters and shared similar experiences in a service project for extended periods of time. Their research found that although the roles of teachers and students remained instructive and inductive of learning respectively, the learning of the students was enhanced as well as the teaching model of the teachers became enhanced because of the positive effects on the students. These positive effects included more meaningful student interaction, enhanced social and personal development, moral development, social and cultural understanding and leadership and communication skills (Warner & Esposito, 2009). Their research goes on to show that because of the flattening of the student teacher roles, these students and

teachers both became more effective in their respective roles. The online and social media environment can serve to emulate this type of service learning by making users more comfortable in sharing ideas, communicating, and thus enhancing their learning and engagement in a given subject.

In an article entitled *Reconsidering Brainstorming*, Paul Mongeau and Mary Claire Morr consider the online environment in the context of brainstorming and how the generation of ideas can flow more freely when the typical barriers of embarrassment of having a bad idea and relative anonymity can further help to positively facilitate idea generation (1999). At the time of the writing of this article, social media did not exist in the context that it does today and certainly internet penetration was nowhere near as prevalent as it is currently, but the type of model expressed in this research is essentially the way that social media has been integrated into our society. For clarification of this, one need only look at almost any Facebook page authored by nearly any person and there are a plethora of ideas being presented at any time and these ideas can be privatized or made for all to see. This type of technology can certainly be adapted and integrated into the educational arena in a way that is safe, effective and engaging, thus facilitating the efficient exchange of ideas in real time as well as over the long term, although there are limitations even to this model of integration.

Section IV – Conclusion

Finally, there are many limitations to social media being implemented in the learning environment and especially in the classroom. As mentioned above, digital divide is likely the most significant issue surrounding a rollout of social media to

augment school curriculum because not every child has access to internet resources; but there are many others. Social media sites are changing every day in a real and dramatic way (Williams, 2008). From a teacher's perspective, this can be a significant challenge. When a lesson plan is based on educating students about how to use a certain Facebook feature, for instance, that very feature could be modified, changed, or even eliminated by the time the lesson plan is implemented. From a policy perspective, this is also an issue because rules and policies may be developed around a certain interface or feature which may change on a daily or weekly basis. It is precisely for this reason that teachers must be trained and possess the ability to be autonomous in the classroom where social media is concerned. Although these issues present a challenge to educators, they must be overcome for the betterment of the education of children in our society.

To conclude the literature review, the subject of integrating social media into the classroom is complex at best. Several issues surround the topic such as teacher and student roles and friendships, digital divide, and limitations of the technology to name only a few. These issues, as social media continues to be integrated into the educational system and policies are put into place and enforced, will continue to be worked out and will evolve over time. Also, these issues will likely evolve over time as more and improved technology continues to be introduced into the daily lives of people and especially school aged children.

Chapter III – Methodology

In any research design, tradeoffs must be made concerning efficiency, efficacy, time, and financial constraints; this study is no different. This research is mainly focused on affluent school districts located in southwest Bakersfield, California; an area known for its upper middle class population. The reason for this is two-fold. First, the school district that the strategic sample is comprised of is convenient for the researcher. Second, although the sample size is small, the teachers in this more affluent school district have most likely dealt with the problems associated with integrating social media into their curriculum. At the very least, they are probably dealing with its impacts. Although this sample does not represent the total population of the entire city, it is thought that these educated professionals will be able to adequately represent the problems that educators and administrators are facing.

Section I – Design of this Research

The interviews that will be conducted in this research are modeled after the phenomenographic approach. Phenomenography is appropriate when a researcher wants to move away from the measurement of performance and towards developing understanding or conception of how others think or view a certain subject (Micari, Calkins & Streitwieser, 2007). Furthermore, this approach can be utilized to, “...examine understanding of teaching and learning themselves” (Micari, et. al.). Hence, the research conducted for this thesis seeks to understand the learning aspect of school age children, the interaction of these children with social media, and teacher/student roles through the use of interviews with teaching professionals.

As this is a contemporary issue, this researcher will seek to obtain opinions from currently working educational professionals and other professionals that may enhance the viewpoint of this research.

The research design in this thesis is non-experimental and will be classified as an analysis of qualitative data. The interview process will be standardized and open-ended in that the same or similar questions will be asked of each interviewee and there are no predetermined responses. The interview guide is attached in appendix A of this thesis. In total, ten interviews will be performed with an array of professionals; 3 teachers at the middle school level (grades 7-8), 3 teachers at the high school level (grades 9-12), 2 principals (one each from the high school and junior high), 1 vice principal (from the high school level) and 1 psychologist (licensed in the state of California as Psy.D.) who specializes in child and adolescent psychology. Through these interviews, this researcher will be able to construct a best practices guide and gather information about the integration of social media into the regular curriculum. This research will likely have an impact on the field of education, as well as administration, because there is currently no best practices guide for professionals, either teachers or administrators, to follow. The purpose of this best practices guide will be to help replace the fragmented and reactionary approaches and rules controlling social media integration in the classroom that policymakers and educators are working from at this time.

Section II – Measurement of the Opinions

Measurement throughout this study will focus on the concepts of roles associated with the student and teacher, social media and learning, and teaching

styles as well as their integration with each other. As this is a qualitative study, there are no set answers or variables that can necessarily be measured on a sliding or constant scale. Rather, the opinions of those interviewed will be taken into account and utilized to formulate a plan of implementation as well as a guide of best practices to assist school administrators and teachers in implementing a social media campaign. Further, this researcher (the interviewer) will be documenting and noting not only the verbal reactions of the subjects interviewed, but also the non-verbal cues that may become evident during the interviews. These verbal and non-verbal reactions will be noted along with each subject's interview guide, collated by theme, and saved for analysis by the researcher.

The measurement of the opinions expressed by the educators and administrators in this research are valid because these are working professionals in the field. Although social media is constantly changing, the opinions gathered will be used in a way that will facilitate a best practices guide for the field of education. Validity of the research will hinge on the fact that each educator and other professionals will be asked the same set of questions and be given a chance to respond with their personal views rather than choosing from a predetermined set of answers that are thought to be within the parameters of what might be answered. Because of the specialization of educators in the role of children's' education, their varied opinions will be relevant to the data that needs to be collected for a study such as this. It is for this reason that this data will likely be a reliable and true indicator of what the research represents in the actual application of social media

implementation, although that is not to say that this research does not have its limitations and delimitations which will be covered further in this chapter.

Section III – Sampling of Teachers and Administrators

The sample size for this research is relatively small (n=10). The main reason for this is the fact that the people who are to be interviewed are educated professional teachers and administrators. Also, interviews are time consuming as well as being resource intensive and therefore, there are financial considerations to take into account as well as time and convenience considerations. Small sample sizes are justified when they are cost effective while at the same time they utilize professional groups of interviewees (Doosje, Spears & Koomen, 1995; Fridlund, 1998; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Elgan & Fridlund, 2009). Also, a key element when choosing small representative samples is to focus on groups of people who are prototypical and suitable for making comparisons (Barnett & Lintz, 1997).

It does bear mentioning that the sample by gender is almost divided in half with 4 of the interviewees being male and 6 being female. Of the males, 2 are administrators and 2 are full-time teachers. Of the females, 5 are full-time teachers and 1 is a full-time psychologist. The sample is diverse in the sense that the experience of the teachers range from 1 year to 32 years with the average teacher experience being 14.3 years of full-time teaching. The psychologist that will be interviewed has been a professional counselor for 11 years and in that time has worked primarily with children and families.

Limitations & Delimitations of This Research

It is worth mentioning that the sample drawn from in this research has been chosen by convenience to the researcher, although all are currently teaching in a school district. These teachers are from a primarily affluent geographical region of Bakersfield, California. It is because of the fact that these teachers are primarily from an affluent school district that limitations will be present in the data. Future research in this area should include a more stratified sample which includes several school districts and teachers in different areas. Another limitation of this particular research is the grade group focus which will be primarily middle school and high school aged children. Clearly this research is focused on social media and grade school level children are not typically the primary users of this media, therefore this level of school aged children has been excluded from this research. Further research might also include focusing on the social media habits and use penetration of this age group.

This sample size is based on a non-probability sampling approach which can be considered purposive and targeted to the type of professionals opinion's that are desired to this specific research. Ideally, the research would include teachers from many, if not all, different states and would include a large sample of administrators at every educational level. Unfortunately, because of financial, time, and convenience constraints, this will not be possible. For the purposes of this particular research, it is believed that the sample to be interviewed is representative of the population and has been justified earlier in this chapter based on previously cited peer reviewed

journal articles. Also, some limitations do exist with regard to the location of the sample and has been discussed earlier in this section.

As for delimitations, there is a definite boundary as to what this research can represent. Certain issues such as digital divide will affect this region differently than areas who serve less affluent areas and districts where a higher percentage of the residents live at or below the poverty line.

Section IV – Collecting Data of this Research

Collection of the data in this research project will be gathered in the form of structured, open-ended interviews. The interview guide which will be used for the interviews is attached in appendix A. The interviews will be conducted at a time and place that are mutually convenient for the researcher and the interviewee. The location will also be private, allowing only the interviewer and the person being interviewed.

Because this research includes interviews on human subjects, the California State University Bakersfield Institutional Review Board has jurisdiction over this researcher's data collection methods. The sponsor of this research is Dr. Chandrasekhar Commuri. The Institutional Review Board's standard protocol was followed which includes drafting a Human Subjects Protocol that outlines the procedure utilized by the researcher for the interviews. Attached to that document, in appendix A, is the interview guide and subject consent form, appendix B, which will be presented to each of the interviewees prior to the interview. All interviews will be recorded to ensure that the researcher will be able to refer back to accurate data

and all interviews will be kept confidential and only accessed by the researcher. A copy of the interview guide is attached in appendix A.

Approval has been granted through the California State University Bakersfield Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the protocol approval process at the university; the exemption approval letter is attached in appendix C. The approval process by the California State University, Bakersfield Institutional Research Board includes passing a multiple choice exam which this researcher passed with a 25/26 (96.15%) on September 24, 2009. Also, the written IRB protocol was sent to Dr. Steve Suter, the University Research Ethics Review Coordinator of California State University, Bakersfield Institutional Research Board and was given approval under the protocol number 11-27. Once the interviews are completed, the interviews will be reviewed and the responses analyzed only by this researcher.

As with any study, there are limitations and delimitations associated with this research. As discussed earlier, the small sample size, although limited in its scope, can be representative of a pool of educated professionals. It bears mentioning that this sample is primarily drawn from a more affluent community in Bakersfield, California. Even though the teachers are from a more affluent region, generalizations can be made about how social media should be implemented in a school's educational plan. Furthermore, these areas may be more in tune with certain aspects of integrating social media in the classroom and will likely have dealt with some of the more challenging aspects of the integration of social media. Further study in this area, for researchers with less financial and time constraints, should focus on a more stratified sample with a larger population base. Also, as

discussed earlier, research building on this study should involve different methodologies being employed such as surveys because this research will establish a foundation of best practices and can be built on by other researchers.

Section V – Analyzing the Data

Analysis of the data will be through content analysis of the information made available to the researcher by those interviewed. Analysis of the data collected during the interviews will yield several ideas from which this researcher will attempt to construct a best practices manual utilizing the best and most prominent ideas brought up throughout the interviews. Adhering to the phenomenographic approach, this researcher will utilize seven steps to analyze the data. These steps include a read-through of all interviews and notes, the significant statements will be summarized then grouped together, a comparison of the statements will be made, similarities will be identified, categorization of each of the groups with the proper linguistic expression and finally, each category will be compared regarding similarities and differences (Elgan & Fridlund, 2009). Finally, a proper analysis of the interviews will be expressed in the findings section; Chapter IV – Details & Discussions of this thesis.

To conclude this chapter, although the sample is relatively small, other studies have demonstrated that small sample sizes of educated professionals can be representative generally of a population (Doosje, Spears & Koomen, 1995; Fridlund, 1998; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Elgan & Fridlund, 2009). Also, the area that the sample is drawn from is believed to be dealing with the problems of integrating social media into their curricula as well as the problems associated with

student's changing learning styles. Further research should include a more stratified sample of teachers from many different geographic locations that have varying types of economic backgrounds of the residents and the ethnography of the different regions for a well-rounded sample. However, it should be noted that this type of research is expensive and may not necessarily yield better or more accurate results.

Chapter IV – Details & Discussion

Chapter IV reports the findings that have been gathered directly as a result of the observations of the teachers interviewed. One must keep in mind that this sample of interviewees was collected from school districts located in a primarily affluent community from the southwest region of Bakersfield, California. Interviews and opinions gathered from areas with different economic factors present will likely draw some similar results and others that vary widely. One finding that may transcend income and economic levels in a community would likely be the teacher's desire for a policy that deals directly with social media and direction dealing with how they would be able to utilize this technology. The lack of policy throughout school districts, both affluent and otherwise, are widespread and should be changed to present teachers, students, and administrators with clear lines of what is acceptable as well as those lines that should not be crossed. This type of policy implementation will likely be a top-down model and will help to shield teachers, students, and school districts from inappropriate behavior and legal and ethical issues. The discussion section will cover findings for the various stakeholder groups that include society as a whole, the school districts themselves, administrators, teachers, students, and parents of students.

Section I – Findings

Throughout the interviews, there were several themes that became evident as each of the teachers interviewed had similar experiences as well as comparable ideas on how social media should be handled in the educational setting. Of those interviewed, many felt that, as one teacher put it, "...we are asking students to do

more than ever before so we should embrace whatever we can as teachers to engage them. Failing to do this would be a disservice to our students.” Some of the ideas that were presented and that came to light in the interviews were similar and amounted to a majority view; some issues that were brought up were identical across the board with the interviewees. Other ideas were definitely interviewee dependent and varied with each of their experiences and different factors such as age, time teaching, student involvement, type of student taught, and subject matter taught by the teacher.

A Problem with Few Supporters

Many of the teachers interviewed saw social media integration in the educational setting as a potential positive for teachers to connect with students and at the same time saw it as a potential liability if not properly dealt with. It is for this very reason that this researcher is astonished at the lack of literature and research available to teachers and administrators as well as the lack of anyone asking the question about whether social media should be integrated or how best to deal with the potential issues surrounding it. Many of those interviewed said things like, “Our school doesn’t have a specific policy that deals specifically with how to integrate social media” and another teacher specifically said that social media was, “outlawed” on their school campus. This is likely referring to the fact that cell phones are not suppose to be used by students but often are and that many of these students have internet access. School computers are blocked from many mainstream social media sites, which effectively only blocks the teachers from access to these sites. Many of the teachers interviewed did express concerns that students are being required to

do, "...more than ever before in the classroom" and that it made sense to, "...connect with them at their level" (personal communication). Of all those interviewed, many of them said that social media definitely needs to be looked at as a way to engage children in the classroom but must be monitored very closely. None of the people interviewed personally wanted to spearhead a campaign to design a policy or implement a social media program noting that social media has many forms and would be hard to regulate with a singular policy.

Establishment of Policies Regarding Social Media

Some of the main commonalities that many of the teachers and administrators shared were the need for a district level policy regarding social media. When asking educators about being "friends" with students³, especially where sites like Facebook were concerned, all of the teachers and administrators relayed that they thought that this type of relationship was completely inappropriate and only served to flatten the teacher/student relationship negatively. This skewing of the roles between teachers and students would likely only serve to assist students in taking advantage of teachers and would potentially put teachers in a difficult position. One teacher even went so far as to say that students, and especially teenage students are, "...mischievous" and "...always looking for ways to exploit teachers." Initially, this researcher thought that teachers would like to be more autonomous in the classroom because every child and class is different, but most teachers were more afraid of inexperienced teachers getting into trouble by letting students cross the line of the student/teacher relationship. Of those interviewed, all

³ This type of friend is referred to in the context of Facebook or other social media sites.

of those asked relayed that they did not know of any teachers that were currently Facebook friends with any of their students, at least among their peer groups. But this is not to say that this type of relationship does not exist in the schools because there are no set rules or policies enacted within the districts that this researcher included in the interviews. All teachers and administrators interviewed cautioned this researcher that this flattening of the roles between teachers and students could potentially harm all of those involved up to and including the school district.

Many of the teachers interviewed suggested a bottom-up approach to building policies and even suggested focus groups of students, teachers, and administrators be utilized to craft the policies that students and teachers would use in their integration of social media. Some even said that they, as one teacher put, "...would rather there be very distinct lines that can be identified." This is a good strategy because children understand specifically how social media is being used by their peers, their friends, and the problems that are inherent in that type of interaction. Their input into a policy for integrating social media would be especially useful when considering a policy decision. In fact, it could make for a great school project or even a class that is developed by juniors or seniors. This proposal will be further explored in Chapter V.

Access to Social Media at School Campuses

Another of the findings that were contrary to the initial hypotheses of the researcher were that school districts did not have any avenues to allow students to utilize social media and that social media had in fact been blocked for the most part in schools and on the school networks and computer banks. Even if teachers

wanted to integrate this type of technology into their classrooms, they would have to get special permission from the school administrator, go through a lengthy process to unblock the websites that they wanted to use, and likely spend a majority of their own personal time setting up and updating the websites. Even though classrooms are beginning to see increases in the amounts and types of technologies that they possess to integrate into their class curriculum, unless administrators at the district level of the schools make it easier to utilize social media and develop policies that set rules and boundaries for teachers and students, this type of technological integration is likely to be rendered useless until these issues are confronted. Technologies such as Smartboards®, Ipads®, and Ipods® that are available to students will be limited in how that are used to engage students and certainly will not be used to their fullest potential.

Benefits to Instituting Social Media

Non-traditional students (non-verbal, mentally deficient, or handicapped children) could benefit along with their parents because of the different interactions that teachers would have to reach these types of students. Some of the teachers interviewed dealt with handicapped children and observed that an entirely new world opened up to the kinds who used digital technologies. These children may be able to better interact in an online environment with teachers and parents because these children are more visually oriented and can better interact with their environment by utilizing this type of technology. Social media can help to take them to a place socially that they may not be able to experience in the real world. One teacher who works in special education said that, "...these children can open up and interact in a

way we can't even understand," when referring to technology. Research of this type is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is being touched on in order to further facilitate ideas for furtherance of the research in this area.

Some Problems are Already Occurring

Schools are already seeing problems associated with social media on their campuses. Some of the problems that have already been identified by teachers and faculty are bullying, spelling problems which may be due to abbreviations used by students in their texting, teachers accessing inappropriate materials from school computers, or posting things to Facebook during class time. Students can also take comments out of context, not fully understand the meaning of things that are said to them in the online environment, and generally let small minor problems become massive issues that are difficult to deal with in their personal relationships. As one teacher put it, "...a minor problem gets blown out of proportion because children do not understand the context and non-verbal cues that go along with the conversation or comment." No longer are people, especially students, able to read not only what the speaker is saying, but many of the non-verbal clues such as facial expression and body language that are vital to the dynamic action of communication between people.

The failure of school districts and administrators to adopt and craft policies has also opened the door to teachers and students becoming friends which, as has already been talked about earlier, serves only to flatten the traditional roles as well as causing students to lose respect for teachers. Also, teachers open themselves up to additional problems when they share photos or other aspects of their personal

lives with students and the rest of the world. Although many social media sites have privacy controls that are meant to keep information private, much of the content posted in the online world can easily be accessed by most anyone with a minimum of effort.

Section II – Discussion

Discussion of the implementation of social media in the classroom involves several stakeholders. In looking at stakeholder groups, society is likely the largest and most important and encompasses all other groups, so this research will touch on this group only briefly. Society will benefit from the integration of social media being integrated into the classroom, because as technology, computers, and social media become more ingrained into our lives and into the human experience, the students of today will need the skills to utilize these types of technology in the future. Without programs that embrace and integrate this technology into today's classrooms, students will be at a disadvantage when competing for jobs in the global economy in future years. This will have a significant impact on society and all populations of people in the United States as other countries that will likely integrate this technology will be ahead of our students who graduate to jobseekers in the coming years.

The Appropriate Age to Implement Social Media

Many of the teachers interviewed talked about an "appropriate age level" for students to begin to use social media. The general consensus for many of the teachers was that at the high school level, students could and should start to be introduced to the proper ways to integrate and utilize social media. It should be

noted that many social media sites, like Facebook, have an age limit of 13 years old to sign up for an account. Many of those interviewed said that they had observed several students prior to the age of 13 had Facebook accounts. It would seem that the students should at least be introduced and talked to about commercial social media sites in the classroom at, or around, the age of 13 which would normally be the 7th grade. One of the teachers thought that social media was so ingrained in our lives and so important that children should start being introduced to it in their first grade class. Obviously, Facebook or MySpace would be completely inappropriate for this age-group, but the possibility of a, “school run social media site” was proposed and will be further discussed in Chapter V.

Changes in Learning Styles

Over the years, children’s learning styles have changed significantly. All of those interviewed agreed that students today do not learn in the same ways that students even 10 years ago learned. Students today can process vast amounts of information and expect that teachers will have a more interactive approach to teaching. Students expect teachers to have more than a book, a pencil, and paper as their tools. Many classrooms have the Smartboard® technology that was introduced in the beginning of this chapter as well as other learning modes for students to utilize. Many of those interviewed saw an opportunity in social media to better engage students as well as the added benefit of letting their parents know what was on the agenda for their children’s classes. A current survey of Facebook even references that classrooms can have a Facebook page where announcements and homework assignments can be put up for students and parents alike to see. All

that parents or students have to do is “like” the page⁴ and they will get an update on their own Facebook page, an email if they have it set up to do so, or even an update on their mobile phone if they have the proper technology; this type of interaction is becoming more and more integrated into society.

Negative Consequences of Failure to Integrate

School districts will be negatively impacted if they fail to integrate social media into the curriculum of their schools. The impact will be seen in the decreases in student engagement and many of the teachers interviewed in this research saw the need, at least at some level, to look at how this technology can be used or at least that best practices could be taught to students by teachers. Many different types of social media exist in the digital world of the internet such as Facebook, youtube, blogs and many others that could potentially be used as teaching tools and integrated into the classroom or other types of curricula. School districts must be aware that students and teachers use many of these types of social media and should draw a distinct line that students, teachers and administrators can identify. This is not only for the safety of the district, but for the interaction of the students and teachers as well. When clear lines are established, teachers may more readily utilize this technology but with no rules or policies regarding how these technologies can be utilized, they remain taboo which causes a fractured type of outlook when teachers and students are talking about how this topic can be approached.

⁴ Liking a page is similar to subscribing to the content of the page or website and is specific to Facebook.

Key Actors in Instituting Social Media

School administrators should be the very people pushing for this type of integration of rules and policies in their schools. The school administrators are charged with a grave responsibility to their students and the teachers they supervise. Without a push by administrators to the district level, again they stand to lose in the legal arena if a problem does arise, as well as losing some of the teaching and engagement that could be possible with this type of integration. These administrators need to do the political maneuvering that is required to institute policies and rules regarding social media because of the subjects timeliness in the education of students and the fact that social media is being used by a majority of these students and teachers in their everyday lives which is what school are primarily charged with; educating students so that they can find jobs and get through the everyday challenges that will be presented to them later in life.

Teachers need regulations and guidelines in the area of social media to help them establish a good rapport with students as well as preserve the student teacher relationship. The flattening of the student teacher role is certainly a distinct possibility and was brought up by many of the interviewees as critical for teachers to understand as far as social media is concerned. This is especially an issue for newer teachers who might feel more comfortable utilizing social media and have a looser or more remedial understanding, because of a lack of experience, of the student teacher relationships; including the roles that they should naturally assume. These are the teachers for whom the rules and policies are especially important

because when specific lines are drawn and rules are established, it is easier for these teachers to understand the meaning behind the implementation of the rules.

Positive Outcomes of Integration

Students will also be affected positively by the integration and implementation of specific rules for utilizing social media in school generally and in the classroom specifically. Because a majority of students are already using these mediums and technologies to interact, teachers can more readily establish connections with students, disseminate homework and classroom functions to students, and make fast changes to classroom curriculum all while engaging students and educating them in a technology they readily accept. As well, all of the stakeholder groups will be positively affected by integrating social media because all of the groups will be on the same page as far as the boundaries associated with social media, students will be able to learn about social media in a safe and effective manner and students and parents will be able to understand in a dynamic environment any changes that may be made in their classrooms.

Parents, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, will also be positively impacted by the utilization of social media in the classroom. In addition to the parents of students being able to get status updates and see what their children are learning about and becoming more informed about their children's education, parents will be able to feel more comfortable that their children are being educated in a medium that they readily accept and will have a better understanding of the positive and negative aspects of using social media. Parents can also see in real time what teachers are doing in their classrooms and parents can become more

involved in the education of their children while not using up valuable teacher time spent on the phone or one on one with parents who have a question about assignments. This also results in a more efficient delivery of services to students and parents both which helps to increase the student and parental engagement, decrease the amount of duplication of talking to parents about student assignment, and keeps parents in the loop of their children's education all at the same time.

The Problem of Digital Divide

Many of the teachers interviewed did not see a problem with digital divide. Although many of the teachers interviewed came from a more affluent school district, the dichotomy was that more affluent schools get less money for computers and associated technology. In fact, at least one of the teachers specifically mentioned that poorer schools are, "luckier" in the sense that they received more federal funding for additional technology geared specifically toward the problem of digital divide. In the more affluent schools, many of the students have cell phones with access to the internet and many of the teachers interviewed did not see access as a problem. Although, there were a few students (one teacher said the number would be around 1 out of 100 students) who did not have access at home. Many of these teachers encouraged students to take advantage of the computer labs after regular school hours or computer labs that are made available at the lunch break. From the interviews conducted and tours of the different campuses that this researcher saw, the problem of digital divide is being properly handled and needs little, if any, other policy intervention to handle this potential problem; at least at this time and in this geographic region.

Section III – Conclusion

In looking at the issue of integrating social media into classrooms and school curricula, it has been shown to be a valuable asset that is available to teachers. Unfortunately, many school district computer systems block this type of technology from school computers and there is not a good way for teachers to integrate this type of technology into their classrooms. Also, there are no, or very fragmented, policies regarding social media so teachers will either be afraid to utilize it in their classrooms, or will utilize it in such a way that the student teacher role becomes skewed which offers opportunities for students to take advantage of teachers in a negative way. It is for this reason that policies need to be enacted to establish a baseline for the integration of social media that students and teachers can understand as well as establish a way to punish those who would seek to take advantage or improperly use social media in the classroom.

Chapter V – Conclusion

Section I – Summary

To summarize this research, social media is pervasive in the lives of the majority of students today and failure to integrate social media to further engage them is doing a disservice to the future leaders of our world. It is a disservice because the world is being dominated by social media and if students do not learn to use it properly or how to integrate it into their lives, they will be at a disadvantage when they are turned out into the workforce. Some research has been done at the college level about how students can be introduced to social media and media in general, but the research is severely lacking when it comes to the pre-collegiate student. Because social media is so pervasive in our society and our world, much more research needs to be done in this area because student learning styles have changed, teaching styles have changed, and the curricula needs to change to keep up with the demand for educated students. Learning the traditional subjects is certainly good for students and should not be taken away, nor is this researcher suggesting that it should. These traditional subjects need to be integrated with a focus on technology and especially a social media component at the very least.

Section II – Recommendations

This section will deal primarily with the suggestions of some of the teachers interviewed as well as the personal observations of the researcher for implementing social media into the curriculum in the educational setting. Many of those interviewed had suggestions on how social media should be implemented and integrated into the school curriculum. In integrating social media into the educational

setting, 4 main points became evident in the interviews; those are the need to develop a plan to integrate social media into the curriculum, the need for a policy that outlines the boundaries to students and teachers, the need to get parents involved with their student's education, and some other alternatives to commercial social media sites. These main points are outlined further in this chapter.

A Plan to Augment School Curriculum

Many of those interviewed did not fully understand how to integrate social media into their own classrooms. Because there was such a fragmented understanding, and many of these people had not gotten together nor had any formal type of plan been conveyed to them about how to deal with the issue of social media other than to say more or less, do not use it at all. This is likely a common knee jerk reaction to a situation that policymakers do not understand or do not know how to fix; but it does pose potential problems if it is not dealt with properly. This researcher, through gathering the data from the interviews, is able to put a plan together for the implementation of social media in the classroom; the culmination of this research.

First, students, teachers, and administrators must be analogous in their thinking when it comes to social media and its implementation. Throughout the interviews, it was established by all of the teachers that "friending" each other through sites such as Facebook is strictly inappropriate. As was proposed earlier, this type of relationship flattens the teacher student roles negatively and causes many other issues. There are other ways to use social media in the classroom such as enlisting teacher's aids to post homework and upcoming events on a class

Facebook page. Parents and students who choose to “like” this page will receive updates and information that is posted to the page immediately. This can help to keep any misunderstandings from happening where teachers and students are concerned and parents can have easy real-time access to what is going on in the classrooms of their children. Also, blogs can be linked to these pages so that students can talk openly about certain subjects, but letting the students know the boundaries of such conversations is key to utilizing this type of forum. It is important for students to be able to utilize this type of forum because it allows them to develop critical thinking skills by seeing both or multiple, sides of an argument as well as allowing them to consider avenues to a problem that they may not have considered previously.

Second, there is so much information at the student’s fingertips, that teachers must embrace this type of technology, both learning and educating themselves about the ways that children are using social media to effectively understand the issues. It is for this reason that schools, or even school districts, should implement student, parent, teacher, and administrator focus groups to find out how students are using social media, what things they would like to see, what parents would be comfortable with their children doing, and how administrators propose to handle the policy perspective. Students know and understand this technology intimately and are ready to integrate it into their lives, it makes sense as one teacher interviewed put it to, “...engage them by speaking their language.”

Finally, teachers are effectively the only ones blocked from social media at school because students can either find a way around the blocking systems that the

school use or just get to it with their mobile phones. The school that this researcher was able to tour had many signs that said no cell phones were to be used at school and a policy against the use of cell phones while on school grounds, but this did not deter any students or any teachers for that matter. Cell phones are so pervasive and integrated into our society that students and teachers see them as essential to their daily lives and are hard pressed to go without them for a significant length of time. It is for this reason that teachers should not only be included in the focus groups, but also attend some type of in-service training regarding the use of social media. This could likely be arranged with the local colleges or universities to assist with the training of teachers in the educational setting. College campuses could also begin training teachers in the proper use of social media, but this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

The Policy Perspective

Any issue in the public sector certainly involves policy perspectives. Because teachers and students do not have a policy to follow, it becomes difficult to approach the issue of integrating and including social media in the classroom or into the teaching of students. A policy that would be developed to include social media in the educational setting at the junior high and high school level would have to set clear boundaries such as which websites could be accessed, who would have control of the pages and content, how would content be monitored and who would deal with complaints. There will also be unintended consequences to deal with as in any situation so policies will need to be flexible to include changes to methods or delivery of this type of technology. Flexible policy also lends itself to changes in the

technology itself which is likely to happen over the months and years and especially with social media because it is an ever-changing medium. The policy should be developed with the focus groups mentioned earlier which would take on a bottom-up approach to the crafting of the policies. As for the implementation and integration of the policies, a top down model would serve better to address all teachers and staff of the educational institutions. This would help to disseminate information to teachers and staff as well as help set the boundaries that teachers and students will be required to follow. This will also allow for a standard of implementation across many schools included in the districts as well as having the added effect of getting the teachers and students on-board with the restrictions put in place by the policies because when those who are affected by a policy also help to craft it, the implementation is much easier and is more likely to be embraced by all involved.

Getting Parents On-Board

Another important aspect of social media is that schools need to get the parents involved with their children's education. This is certainly true of any educational institution, but when social media is concerned, it is especially important. Parents should be monitoring what their children are doing at home, but probably are not doing so as far as the internet and social media is concerned. It is for this reason that once the teachers are trained and understand the technology, they should help parents to understand the technology as well. Offering short classes to parents after hours or on weekends would be a good solution to getting parents more involved in the education of their children. While at the outset, it may seem like a lot of extra added workload for teachers, this researcher believes that teachers

would actually see a decrease in their workload because the social media sites would be updating the parents, email communication would be facilitated, and parents would be able to ask short questions and not keep teachers talking on the phone for long periods of time asking about homework. Students could solicit their classmates for help with homework problems and parents could see all of this going on in real time; the ultimate integration of the idea of transparency.

Other Alternatives to Social Media

There are many alternatives to the typical websites that people think of when someone says social media such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Many of these are educationally based and some are even for children. A list of some of these educational websites is attached to this thesis as appendix E. This is not an exhaustive list and is only included as an example for interested parties to look at as examples of safe environments for children to interact and use in a social context. Many colleges and universities have many different types of social media platforms that are primarily educational such as moodle, blackboard and others. These sites allow the same types of interaction among students that commercial social networking sites allow while limiting their access to those included at the schools. In many of the interviews, this was suggested as a way to teach children about how to use social media in a safe and controlled manner while keeping the school districts, teachers and administrators with a minimum of exposure to liability. Certainly there are many other types of alternatives such as power point presentations about social media, lecture classes about the dangers of unsafe behaviors online, and others that have previously been mentioned. There will continue to be new and innovative ways

to integrate and implement social media in the educational setting and further research will need to be performed to continue to keep teachers and schools, as well as the students they teach, to be up to date and current with the changing landscape of technology.

Roles and Their Role in the Classroom

Social media can be an extremely effective tool for teachers when used wisely. When it is not properly controlled, utilized, and respected for what it is, it can cause the breakdown of the critical role of the teacher and student and their interaction together. It is for this reason that these recommendations include a wide variety of solutions and procedures to minimize unintended consequences. By the utilization and inclusion of students, teachers and administrators in focus groups, these unintended consequences and role breakdowns can be minimized and more information about the actual usage habits of students will become evident. Teachers and administrators will be on hand to guide the crafting of policies that can be flexible and effective for all involved including students, teachers, administrators, and policy makers. It is in this way that the roles in each level of the organization can remain intact and a significant negative breakdown of these roles will not be realized.

Section III – Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that social media needs to be integrated in the educational setting certainly in high school and junior high, but also needs to be talked about and taught at the elementary level. There are a variety of ways that teachers and administrators can do this such as school and district administered

web presences that imitate social media sites, better training to teachers and students, focus groups can be utilized to develop policies that can be implemented by the school districts, but the most important fact is that policies need to be put in place to minimize the exposure of teachers and school districts to liability. Also, students must be protected from the harms that social media can bring to light. As well, policies will establish a clear line for teachers, students, and administrators to follow when implementing or utilizing social media at their campuses. To draw a clear line by saying, "Don't use it at all" is certainly not a good policy and does a disservice to students by not preparing them for the world that they will shape and in which they will ultimately live in and take charge of someday. Clearly, policies need to be developed, implemented and integrated that allows, and thus fosters, the use of social media to further engage students.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Questions

1. How important is it to integrate Social Media into educational curriculum?
2. What are some ways to augment school curriculum to include social media?
3. How is social media being utilized to your understanding right now?
4. How can educators approach the problem of digital divide; i.e. making social media available to students who might not have computers or internet access?
5. How might students, teachers and school districts be negatively impacted if social media is not integrated into school curriculum?
6. Should teachers push for integration of social media technology to be implemented into the schools curriculum? If so, why?
7. What are the possible boundaries between students and teachers concerning social media; i.e. “friends” (what is appropriate)?
8. Who should set those boundaries?
9. What grade levels are appropriate to utilize this technology and why?
10. Instead of commercial social networking sites, are there others that might be more appropriate for this type of integration? If so, what are they?
11. What types of problems have you heard of, seen, or anticipate with utilization of this technology?
12. Conversely, what might be the benefits to utilization of this technology?
13. How have children’s and adolescent’s learning styles changed with new technology?
14. How should adult content be handled; i.e. filtering?

Appendix B

Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

PROJECT TITLE: Utilizing Social Media to Increase Student Engagement: A Study of Kern County Public Schools

I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore the implications associated with implementing social media in the classroom as well as establishing a best practices guide to utilize social media in the classroom.

I understand that I will answer a few personal questions and will be interviewed by a student researcher at a mutually convenient time and in a private location of my choosing. The initial interview will require 20 to 40 minutes and will be digitally-recorded. These recordings will only be available to the researcher and will remain in a locked cabinet while not in use. Only the researcher will have access to the results of the interviews or recordings. I also understand that I may be contacted for a second interview to verify meaning and discuss findings. These comments and results will be available to the researcher and will be handled as any other interview with the interviewees. The second interview (15 to 20 minutes) would occur within 3 months of the first interview.

I understand that all identifying information which might link me to my interview data will be kept confidential. Only an identification number or false name will appear on the tapes or printed materials. No one will be able to associate my name with my data. The recorded interviews will be transcribed by the student-researcher and only the researcher will have access to any comments or recorded materials. A master copy of all participant names will be kept in a locked file in the student researcher's office. Only he will have access to this list. This list, the audio-recordings, and the personal information sheets will all be destroyed within one year after the completion of the study. The narrative transcripts without identifiers will be kept for possible future research. My name will not be used in written reports or presentations of the study findings.

I understand that I am free to choose not to participate in this study. In addition, if I do choose to participate I am free to withdraw at any time, even in the middle of an interview, without penalty. This means that I can ask to have the tape-recorder turned off at any time during the interview. In this case, the student-researcher will make notes based on my responses to the interview questions. If I choose not to participate, or to withdraw during the course of the study, it will not have a negative effect on the agency or interviewee.

This data will be used to complete a student thesis regarding social media and its integration into school curriculum. The culmination of this project will result in a best practices guide and can be made available upon request.

Benefits: I understand that this study may or may not be of direct benefit to me. It has not been designed to provide direct benefits to participants. Rather, it is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will help teachers to better implement media, especially social media in their classrooms in the future.

Risks: I expect that I will experience a minimum of risk, discomfort or stress while participating in this study. However some questions may be personal and thought-provoking or emotional in nature. If I do become uncomfortable during the interview, the interview will stop and additional time will be available to talk about these thoughts. Should I need further assistance with residual emotional feelings after the interview, I understand that I may contact the Counseling Center located at my

employing school. If services are not available at my school, I may contact the Student Researcher or the sponsor to obtain a referral to the county mental health center.

If I have further questions about the research itself, or if I wish to obtain a summary of the results of the research, I may contact:

Steven Lance Bynum
PO Box 21061
Bakersfield, CA 93390
(661) 316-5923
bynumsteven@gmail.com

In addition I may contact the MPA faculty member serving as thesis/project committee chair with questions about the research, or if I have a research-related problem:

Dr. Chandrasekhar Commuri
Associate Professor - Department of Business & Public Administration
California State University, Bakersfield
Bakersfield, CA 93311-1099
ccommuri@csub.edu
661-654-6140

For questions regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact:

Dr. Steve Suter
University Research Ethics Review Coordinator
Institutional Review Board/Human Subjects Research
Department of Psychology
California State University, Bakersfield
Bakersfield, CA 93311-1099
(661) 654-2373

Authorization: I have read this form completely and have decided that I will participate in the study described. The general purpose, the requirements of participation and possible hazards and inconveniences of participating have been explained to my satisfaction. I will be given a copy of this consent form. My signature indicates my consent to participate.

Signatures:

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C



CSU Bakersfield

Academic Affairs

Office of the Grants, Research, and Sponsored Programs (GRaSP)

Mail Stop: 24 DDH Room 108
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Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research

Date: 23 February 2011
To: Steven Lance Bynum, PPA Student
Chandrasekhar Commuri, Public Policy & Administration
cc: Paul Newberry, IRB Chair
From: Steve Suter, University Research Ethics Review Coordinator
Subject: **Protocol 11-27: Authorization Following Exemption from Full Review**

Anne Duran, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
Scientific Concerns

Roseanna McCleary, Ph.D.
Masters of Social Work
Scientific Concerns

Thomas Blommers, Ph.D.
Department of Modern Languages
Nonscientific/Humanistic Concerns

Lily Alvarez, B.A.
Kern County Mental Health
Community Issues/Concerns

Grant Herndon
Schools Legal Service
Community Issues/Concerns

Tommy W. Tunson, J.D.
Criminal Justice
Community Issues/Concerns

Kathleen Gilchrist, Ph.D.
Department of Nursing
Scientific Concerns

Paul Newberry, Ph.D.
Department of Philosophy/
Religious Studies
Nonscientific/Humanistic Concerns
IRB/HSR Chair

Yeunjo Lee, Ph.D.
Department of Special Education
Nonscientific/Humanistic Concerns

Steve Suter, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
Research Ethics Review Coordinator
and IRB/HSR Secretary

I am pleased to inform you that your protocol, "**Utilizing Social Media to Increase Student Engagement by Augmenting School Curriculum**", has been approved, following exemption from full review. This research activity was exempted as defined in Paragraph 46.101 of Title 45, *Code of Federal Regulations* based on the following criteria: (1) Research involving the use of [standardized] educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior, UNLESS: (a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and (b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation. Approval is based on your materials received on 2-18-11 and your clarifications and revisions in response to reviewer comments completed on 2-23-11.

This authorization is strictly limited to the specific activities that have been authorized by the IRB. If you want to modify these activities, notify the IRB in advance so proposed changes can be reviewed. If you have any questions, or there are any unanticipated problems or adverse reactions, please contact me immediately.

The following person[s], only, are authorized to interact with subjects in collecting data, with data containing personal identifiers, or in obtaining informed consent. Investigator is responsible for ensuring that any assistants interacting with data having personal identifiers are HSPT certified.

Human Subjects Protection Training Certified:
Steven Lance Bynum [1-19-11] & Chandrasekhar Commuri [11-10-03]

Any signed consent documents must be retained for at least three years to enable research compliance monitoring and in case of concerns by research participants. Consent forms may be stored longer at the discretion of the principal investigator [PI]. The PI is responsible for retaining consent forms. If the PI is a student, the faculty supervisor is responsible for the consent forms. The consent forms must be stored so that only the authorized investigators or representatives of the IRB have access. At the end of the retention period the consent forms must be destroyed [not re-cycled or thrown away]. Please destroy all audio tapes after scoring.

This authorization will be valid until the end of January 2012.

Appendix D

Table 1155. Household Internet Usage by Type of Internet Connection and State: 2009

[In percent. As of October. See headnote, Table 1154. Based on Current Population Survey. See Appendix III]

State	Any-where	In the home			No Internet use	State	Any-where	In the home			No Internet use
		Total	Broad-band	Dial-up				Total	Broad-band	Dial-up	
U.S.	76.68	68.69	63.53	4.74	23.3	MO.	73.99	63.67	57.50	5.51	26.01
AL.	66.60	56.13	48.44	6.38	33.4	MT.	76.73	64.06	58.30	5.60	23.27
AK.	86.27	77.26	72.97	3.63	13.7	NE.	79.77	70.00	63.89	4.39	20.23
AZ.	79.75	72.08	67.16	4.48	20.3	NV.	79.23	72.38	67.70	3.75	20.77
AR.	66.10	55.88	51.01	4.48	33.9	NH.	83.09	78.74	73.21	5.00	16.91
CA.	79.88	73.09	67.63	4.85	20.1	NJ.	81.05	76.81	72.44	4.19	18.95
CO.	82.39	72.91	68.77	3.79	17.6	NM.	72.51	61.71	54.62	7.09	27.49
CT.	80.62	74.75	70.75	3.69	19.4	NY.	75.57	70.65	65.80	4.47	24.43
DE.	77.47	71.07	66.70	3.61	22.5	NC.	73.21	63.86	59.34	4.35	26.79
DC.	80.88	71.78	66.21	5.46	19.1	ND.	77.18	67.10	62.54	3.89	22.82
FL.	78.35	71.53	66.59	4.66	21.7	OH.	75.98	66.85	61.44	5.17	24.02
GA.	75.89	67.61	63.94	3.54	24.1	OK.	73.40	60.65	55.82	4.69	26.60
HI.	79.07	73.33	69.97	3.36	20.9	OR.	84.03	76.00	70.08	5.69	15.97
ID.	81.39	72.18	67.40	4.42	18.6	PA.	73.61	67.31	61.57	5.43	26.39
IL.	78.30	68.31	62.54	5.45	21.7	RI.	77.01	71.57	69.47	1.80	22.99
IN.	70.93	62.51	56.48	5.75	29.1	SC.	69.00	58.26	53.30	4.82	31.00
IA.	77.24	67.79	62.02	5.40	22.8	SD.	74.62	65.49	59.65	5.60	25.38
KS.	79.43	70.48	66.78	3.06	20.6	TN.	69.80	62.33	55.44	6.47	30.20
KY.	69.10	59.49	53.55	5.45	30.9	TX.	72.91	63.93	59.92	3.28	27.09
LA.	69.67	60.59	57.06	3.05	30.3	UT.	86.41	77.86	73.34	4.14	13.59
ME.	77.30	70.19	61.35	8.45	22.7	VT.	82.58	70.80	60.61	7.73	17.42
MD.	80.98	73.37	69.76	3.21	19.0	VA.	77.73	71.02	65.01	5.83	22.27
MA.	80.78	75.85	72.93	2.19	19.2	WA.	86.26	77.93	72.41	5.21	13.74
MI.	78.03	68.03	62.32	5.42	22.0	WV.	66.30	59.72	52.05	7.52	33.70
MN.	82.52	72.38	66.91	5.22	17.5	WI.	79.90	71.81	66.95	4.67	20.10
MS.	62.58	51.80	41.76	9.31	37.4	WY.	79.87	69.79	65.55	3.77	20.13

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, "Current Population Survey (CPS) Internet use 2009," November 2009, <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/data/CPS2009_Tables.html>.

Table 1156. Internet Access and Usage: 2009

[For persons 18 years old and over (225,887 represents 225,887,000. As of fall 2009. Based on sample and subject to sampling error; see source for details)]

Characteristic	Total adults	Have Internet access			Used the Internet in the last 30 days		
		Home or work or other	Home	Work	Home or work or other	Home	Work
Total adults, (1,000) ¹	225,887	195,960	167,972	84,132	167,294	150,756	73,393
PERCENT DISTRIBUTION							
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Age:							
18 to 34 years old	30.50	32.49	31.34	32.39	35.20	33.46	31.60
35 to 54 years old	38.31	40.27	42.21	50.12	41.78	42.94	51.45
55 years old and over	31.20	27.24	26.45	17.49	23.02	23.60	16.94
Sex:							
Male	48.33	48.35	48.58	49.63	48.01	47.96	49.42
Female	51.67	51.65	51.42	50.37	51.99	52.04	50.58
Census region: ²							
Northeast	18.43	19.09	19.81	18.64	19.11	19.67	18.80
Midwest	22.06	22.13	21.71	22.35	22.24	22.04	21.54
South	36.76	35.41	34.43	34.51	34.49	34.03	34.52
West	22.76	23.37	24.05	24.51	24.16	24.26	25.14
Household size:							
1 to 2 persons	46.55	43.81	41.68	41.90	41.99	41.54	42.17
3 to 4 persons	37.23	39.51	41.38	43.28	41.15	41.97	43.19
5 or more persons	16.22	16.68	16.94	14.82	16.85	16.48	14.64
Any child in household	40.02	42.31	43.40	45.93	44.05	44.06	45.95
Marital status:							
Single	25.95	26.66	24.91	24.71	28.06	26.36	23.90
Married	55.01	57.29	60.86	62.05	57.83	60.27	62.93
Other	19.04	16.05	14.22	13.24	14.12	13.37	13.16
Educational attainment:							
Graduated college plus	26.92	30.43	33.93	46.28	34.53	36.78	49.43
Attended college	27.90	30.49	31.41	32.40	32.69	32.66	31.93
Did not attend college	45.18	39.08	34.66	21.32	32.79	30.55	18.64
Employed full-time	49.48	53.69	55.43	86.04	57.36	57.30	87.71
Employed part-time	11.91	12.62	12.83	13.32	13.26	13.29	11.80
Household income:							
Less than \$50,000	41.54	35.24	29.12	18.07	30.43	27.04	16.23
\$50,000 to \$74,999	19.36	20.70	21.46	20.21	21.02	21.19	19.69
\$75,000 to \$149,999	28.65	32.14	35.80	43.15	35.15	37.27	44.34
\$150,000 or more	10.45	11.92	13.62	18.57	13.40	14.50	19.75

¹ Includes other labor force status not shown separately. ² For composition of regions, see map, inside front cover.
Source: Mediamark Research & Intelligence, LLC, New York, NY, CyberStats, fall 2009 (copyright); <<http://www.mriplus.com/pocketpiece.html>>.

Appendix E

Short List of Educational Websites (Social Media)

<http://www.clubpenguin.com>

<http://www.socialmediaforchildren.com>

<https://www.whatswhat.me>

<http://www.californiastreaming.org>

<http://www.fantage.com>

<http://www.girlsgogames.com>

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