Student Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Interaction on Facebook During Practicum

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Abstract—**Student teachers are frequently frustrated by a perceived conflict between the teaching of literacy learned in teaching/learning method courses or practice courses where they see in classrooms and the reality of practicum. The purpose of this study is to investigate student teachers' attitudes toward the interaction on the online social networking site, Facebook, which is a conversation-friendly online community for student teachers to seek help, express experiences, reflect on their observations/beliefs, aiming to continue to refine their practice and keep them connected to a larger community. The survey data was collected from 20 undergraduate student teachers at a Taiwanese technological university during their practicum. Results indicated student teachers' positive responses to the interaction on Facebook with regard to aspects of interest/enjoyment, value/usefulness, and communication tools. The discussion suggested that student teachers' interaction with peers and instructors via Facebook during practicum should be encouraged.**

Keywords-facebook; practicum; student teacher; communication tools

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication technology has transformed computer from being truly a device for data processing to a completely multi-function tool with communication at its core. With the focus on teaching/learning and communication in the major criteria for teaching practicum, instructors never stop in searching and developing better ways for reaching more effective teaching goals, accessing authentic materials, and providing techniques that will benefit their students' knowledge and enhance their skills in the reality of workforce. Student teachers are dramatically frustrated, confused, and alone by a perceived conflict between the teaching of literacy learned in teaching/learning method courses or practice courses where they see in classrooms and the reality of practicum. They need and want opportunities to observe, interact, and collaboratively reflect with others who are experiencing the same situation. However, providing feedback to student teachers promptly is difficult because they are normally not at campus areas.

It's quite a good avocation that "Don't leave learning behind." And yes, don't let teaching be a lonely business. As the use of communication technology in classroom instruction has been increasing dramatically around the world. It is natural that it should play a significant role in building bridges from school to work in terms of finding connections from principles to practices. Through communication technology tools, with consideration of research issues of goals, design and development, and assessment, the purposes of this study are to use an online social networking platform, Facebook, a conversation-friendly online community, for student teachers to seek help, express experiences, reflect on beliefs/observations, aiming to continue to refine their authenticity of teaching/learning philosophy, encourage their cooperation (use of cooperative learning), and keep them connected to a large community. In this study, the teachers seek to promote an effective, alternative avenue for facilitating student teachers' practices in which technology is used along with the implementation of cooperative learning to offer facilitation in the college language arts education practicum. The focus of the study is to investigate student teachers' attitudes toward the interaction with peers and instructors via Facebook with regard to aspects of interest/enjoyment, value/usefulness, and communication tools.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Northcote and Kendle (2001) indicated that participating in online learning activities such as discussing in online forums and searching for information online may give students the opportunity to acquire many practical online skills in a more incidental, and informal manner. The result of a recent study conducted by Roblyer et al. (2010) showed that university students are very open to the possibility of using Facebook and similar technologies to support classroom work. Moreover, through the online community, FB users are able to sustain meaningful and dynamic educational experiences, exercise higher levels of thinking skills and construct knowledge (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004), particularly in the language classroom.

A number of studies discussed both positive and negative impacts from the use of Facebook for learning. The positive impacts are related to learner motivation and engagement (Mills, 2009; Northcote & Kendle, 2001), and strengthening students' social networking practices (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009). On the contrary, the negative impacts include wasting or overspending of time (Fodeman & Monroe, 2009), and encouraging negative attitudes and affecting students' social growth detrimentally (Queirolo, 2009).

III. METHOD

A. Participants

The participants in this study are 20 final-year student teachers enrolled in a course, Teaching Practicum (TP), at a university of technology in Taiwan. All of them were seniors; 3 were male and 17 were female.

This course aims at providing students with English teaching practicum. Students are asked to participate in a 10-week TP, promoting the activity, reading and telling stories to children who are between 4 and 6 years old at a kindergarten. Through the participation in this project, students are expected to help children practice English listening, speaking, reading and thinking skills and to become the English teacher trainers in the future. The instructor set up a discussion platform on Facebook with the aim of supplementing and reinforcing F2F teaching and learning beyond university-based classes.

B. Survey

The questionnaire in this study was given to these undergraduate student teachers on June 4, 2012. After the data were collected, all of the data of the Likert-type response items from the questionnaire were coded in an SPSS for WINDOWS datasheet for the purpose of analysis.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections totaling twenty-six questions. The surveys were anonymous to reduce the potential for uncomfortable feelings on the part of the participants. Section I contained four questions designed to elicit background information from the participants, such as gender, and perceptions of computer use via Facebook.

Section II contained twenty-two items that were designed around a five-point Likert-type scale. The 22 questions include six measuring interest/enjoyment in online interaction on Facebook, eleven measuring perceived value/usefulness of the online interaction on Facebook, and five measuring feelings of communication tools with regard to the online interaction on Facebook.

IV. RESULTS

From the questionnaire results, the student teachers' attitudes toward the interaction on Facebook during their practicum were analyzed in terms of the mean scores of their answers on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for slightly agree, 2 for disagree, and 1 for strongly disagree.

A. Interest/enjoyment

Questionnaire statements 5-10 were related to student teachers' interest/enjoyment in online interaction on Facebook. The mean scores of items 5, 6, 9, and 10 were over 4.0. A total of 100% of the participants agreed that they enjoyed interacting with friends (Q5:M=4.55) and thought that interacting with friends was fun (Q6:M=4.55). 100% of them also agreed that interacting with friends was very interesting and enjoyable (Q9:M=4.10 & Q10:M=4.15). 95% of the student teachers did not agree that interacting with friends was a boring activity and 5% of them slightly agreed with it (Q7:M=1.7). The majority of them (75%) did not agree that interacting with friends did not hold any attention at all; 20% of them slightly agreed and only 5% of them

agreed with it (Q8:M=2.0). In general, student teachers' responses to interest/enjoyment in online interaction on Facebook were positive.

B. Value/usefulness

In the questionnaire, statements 11-21 were to investigate how the student teachers perceived value/usefulness of the online interaction on Facebook. The mean scores of items 12, 13, 14, 19, and 20 were over 4.0; the mean scores of the other items, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 21 were over 3.50. A total of 100% of the participants agreed that reading others' postings during practicum was useful (Q11:M=3.85); that their classmates shared problem-solving experience on Facebook (Q12:M=4.05); that Facebook is useful for learning from others' problem-solving experience (Q13:M=4.05); that Facebook is suitable for learning from others' practicum experience (Q14:M=4.10); that the postings on Facebook could be of some value to them (Q17:M=3.80); that interacting with peers, and friends could be beneficial to them (Q19:M=4.30); that interacting with the instructor could be beneficial to them on the teaching skills (Q20:M=4.45). 95% of them agreed that Facebook facilitated information sharing (Q15:M=3.95); that Facebook facilitated knowledge construction (Q16:M=3.50); that they would be willing to do this again because it has some value to them (Q18:M=3.65); that this is an important activity (Q21:M=3.95), while 5% of the student teachers did not agree with these items, 15, 16, 18, and 21. As such, the student teachers in this study positively perceived value/usefulness of the online interaction on Facebook.

C. Communication tools

Students teachers are positive about the Facebook (FB) as an online communication tool because by participating in FB, 100% of them felt that FB is a good learning tool (Q22:M=3.95). Furthermore, 95% of them agreed that they gained some confidence from talking with peers on FB (Q23:M=3.70); that they felt pretty confident after discussing with the instructor on FB (Q24:M=3.80); that they felt getting connected with the university from talking with peers on FB (Q25:M=3.70), while 5% of them did not agree with those items, 23, 24, and 25. In addition, 90% of student teachers participated in this study felt getting closed with the university from talking with the instructor on FB, while still 10% of them did not agree with it (Q26:M=3.65).

V. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

From the findings of the survey questionnaire, the student teachers' attitudes toward the interaction on the online social networking site, Facebook (FB), were clearly investigated. Results indicated student teachers' positive responses to the interaction on FB with regard to aspects of interest/enjoyment, value/usefulness, and communication tools.

Many studies have discussed the positive as well as negative effects on the use of FB for learning. As Junco's (2011) study indicated, university students' time spent on Facebook and the frequency of checking Facebook were negatively associated with their engagement in educationally relevant activities. Similarly, Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) mentioned that Facebook users tended to have lower GAP and invested less time on their studies than non-users. However, the current study found that the majority of the

student teachers had positive attitudes toward the use of FB for learning with regard to aspects of interest/enjoyment, value/usefulness, and communication tools. Therefore, student teachers' interaction with peers and instructors via Facebook during practicum should be encouraged.

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