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Sage E. Sirotkin

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Secondary English Language Arts Teachers' Experiences Using Social Media for Instruction

by

Sage E. Sirotkin

M.Ed., State University of New York at Cortland, 2002

BA, Syracuse University at Utica College, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

Social media has provided innovative ways for teachers to engage students in the learning process but has created a challenge for teachers to incorporate these applications in a manner that is both meaningful to the learning objectives and acceptable to their administration. While social media in education has been the focus of many studies, research on the implementation of social media within English language arts (ELA) classrooms is limited, leaving ELA teachers and school administrators without a full scope of the educational potential or best practices when using social media for instruction. Accordingly, this study explored the experiences of secondary ELA teachers using social media as an instructional tool. Using a basic qualitative design, this investigation was framed by the concepts of connectivism and convergence culture. The study employed in-depth interviews of 9 teachers chosen through a purposeful sampling of ELA teachers within the United States. Data analysis began with a priori coding of the interview transcripts based on the conceptual framework, followed by a secondary analysis through in vivo coding. The results indicated that social media networks provided teachers with an engaging and relevant approach to connect their content and instruction to students' lives. Results also revealed that while the teachers faced challenges similar to those noted in previous research, these challenges were viewed as opportunities to teach digital literacy within the ELA content rather than as a deterrent. The results of this study may allow teachers to use social media networks as educational tools in alignment with instructional practices to improve student performance.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all of my kids, the ones who call me “Mom” and the ones who call me “Miss.” You remind me every day of what matters most, and help me to be a better mom, a better teacher, and a better person.

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I would like to thank and acknowledge the people who have supported me during my doctoral journey. To my husband, Michael, thank you for keeping me steeped in tea and the kids in clean laundry, for being my thesaurus when the word was right on the tip of my tongue, and for the weekend hotel trips when I just needed a change of scenery (and the kids needed a pool). You are my rock. To my awesome kids: Ryan, Jonah, Garrett, Elijah, and Meredith, thank you for the great discussions, for making me laugh when I really needed it, and for letting me say "just let me finish this sentence" 17 times before I answered your questions or made dinner. I hope that I have shown you that you can do anything you set your mind to. There is no goal too big, no dream too far beyond your reach.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

High schools are tasked with preparing students for college and career, including the complexities of living and working in a 21st-century society. Currently, there is a disconnect between the learning experiences students have in the classroom and the skills needed for college and career in the 21st century (Greenlaw, 2015; Gretter & Yadav, 2016). The Partnership for 21st Century Learning in partnership with Battelle for Kids (2019a) has identified an extensive set of skills students need to be prepared to succeed in an ever-evolving society, including innovative communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and information and media literacy. However, only 32 states have partnered school districts with developed initiatives that support these specific skills for 21st-century readiness (EdLeader21, 2019). Gretter and Yadav (2016) noted that regardless of the advancement in common technologies, the curricula in public schools have not been aligned to include digital literacies.

As the modern world entered and became embedded in the digital age, students became more adept at using technologies in educational settings (Boholano, 2017). The Internet provided a means to engage students in learning in new ways and changed the landscape of classroom instruction. Although students are using new technologies such as social media platforms for social exploration, the educational value of these technologies has been debated (Bartow, 2014). The infusion of technology into every aspect of contemporary society requires educational institutions to evolve with these technologies (Bartow, 2014; George, Pope, & Reid, 2015; Greenhow & Askari, 2015). George, Pope, and Reid (2015) identified English language arts (ELA) teachers as being particularly

impacted as new technologies, including social media networks, have expanded literacy into the digital realm. Rainey and Storm (2017) explored the connection between disciplinary literacies (literacies within content areas) and digital literacies noting the responsibility of ELA teachers to guide students in their participation in online networks dedicated to academic discourse. Kaspar (2018) asserted that ELA teachers had an obligation to "adopt transformative practices" (p. 56) to deal with new digital literacies. Moreover, Rainey and Storm (2017) posited that providing opportunities for students to participate in these online networks as part of their ELA curriculum not only benefits the communities to which they contribute but also helps to shape the students' "literary knowledge, practices, norms, and assumptions" (p. 207).

In the current study, I explored the experiences of secondary ELA teachers in the United States who use social media as a teaching tool with their students. In this chapter, I provide a brief background of the current research regarding educational uses of social media. Next, I explore the connection between the problem I addressed and the focus of my study through the problem statement and purpose of the study. I describe how my conceptual frameworks of connectivism and convergence culture were related to my study and provide an overview of these theories. This chapter also includes definitions of relevant terms. A discussion of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the study provides additional contextual information necessary to the study. The chapter concludes with an examination of the significance of the study.

Background

Although the pedagogy of the 1990s included an increasing drive to deliver a 21st-century skill set, the technologies of that time did not support the use of the Internet for much beyond information retrieval (Greenlaw, 2015). The Internet has evolved away from search engines and virtual home-based libraries to allow users to participate in the construction of available information. These opportunities for users to shape and collaborate on the knowledge base of any given topic has provided educators with the means to engage their students in creating their own learning experiences (Greenhow & Askari, 2015).

Researchers of studies conducted in schools outside of the United States have identified the academic advantages of using social media with students, including increased academic achievement, peer-to-peer learning, and heightened engagement (Casey & Wells, 2015; Cimen & Yilmaz, 2017; Dalsgaard, 2016). Studies of social media platforms used for dedicated classroom interactions, such as closed Facebook groups, have indicated increased student interest and participation (Akcaoglu & Bowman, 2016) and supported multiple methods of learning interactions (Rap & Blonder, 2015). Regardless of the benefits of social media for educational use, teachers noted concerns about using these tools with their students even as they conceded to using social media networks for their own professional development (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Manca and Ranieri (2016) identified teacher concerns including a low perceived educational value, inexperience, technological self-efficacy, concerns of privacy and accessibility, and lack of institutional support. Nagle (2018) noted the changes to teachers' ethical

responsibilities that have arisen with digital applications. These concerns have led to a reluctance to use social media networks as an instructional tool (Akcaoglu & Bowman, 2016; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). In addition, school districts have prohibited the use of social media networks as resources (George et al., 2015; Schwarz & Caduri, 2016). Even students noted a dichotomy in the social media experience (Smith, 2016). Smith's (2016) study of student perceptions of social media revealed that college students recognized that social media provided a positive social connection but also acted as a distraction. Despite the research and the identified concerns of educators regarding the educational use of social media, little is known about the lived experiences of secondary school teachers in the United States who use social media with their students.

Problem Statement

The problem for this qualitative study was the lack of understanding of the actual experiences of ELA teachers in the United States using social media as a tool for instruction. Through the advent of social media networks, Web 2.0 gave teachers and learners the opportunity to collaborate beyond geographical barriers, generated the potential for building alliances across cultures, and provided the means for a societal climate change (Huber & Bates, 2016; Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). Greenlaw (2015) argued that even with the educational capabilities of Web 2.0, current pedagogies are lacking in teaching students how to integrate their classroom learning into the digital learning skills needed in today's workforce.

Recent studies provided data on the use of social media as a tool for instructional management (Bartow, 2014), engagement and motivation (Al-Rahmi & Zeki, 2017;

Alsaied, 2017), relationship building and social-emotional health (Akcayir, 2017; Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015; Balcikanli, 2015), collaborative learning (Balcikanli, 2015; Bozanta & Mardikyan, 2017), and academic achievement (Ainin, Nasqshbandi, Moghavvemi, & Jaafer, 2015; Alsaied, 2017). In addition, recent studies have focused on specific content areas such as chemistry (Rap & Blonder, 2015), environmental science (Karahan & Roehrig, 2016), middle school science (Becker & Bishop, 2016), social studies (Kahveci, 2015; Krutka, 2014), civics (Gleason & von Gillern, 2018), and physical education (Franks & Krause, 2017). Within ELA, teachers have authored articles exploring their experiences and providing advice to their colleagues (Barnwell, 2018; Loomis, 2018). However, these articles reflect personal experiences, not empirical research. At the time of the current study, research on ELA teachers in the United States was limited. Rust (2015) conducted a study of adolescents in a midwestern ELA classroom who use Ning as a virtual classroom space. However, this study addressed only one classroom and one social media application (Rust, 2015). Karal, Kokoc, and Cakir (2017) examined the use of language in a Facebook group in a literature classroom in Turkey. However, similar to the Rust study, Karal et al's study was limited to one class and one social media application. There was a gap in the research conducted on ELA teachers in the United States who use social media networks as instructional tools. This gap meant that ELA teachers and school administrators did not have a full scope of the educational potential and best practices for social media use in the classroom. I hoped to gain a better understanding of the experiences of ELA teachers who use social media as

an educational tool, and to discover best practices for social media use in ELA classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of ELA teachers who use social media tools for instruction. I gathered data through video interviews with secondary ELA teachers in the continental United States who currently use or have recently used social media with their students. These interviews provided an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences when using social media as a teaching tool.

Research Questions

This study addressed the experiences of ELA teachers who are currently using or have recently used social media as an instructional tool. Three research questions guided my study:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of secondary school ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

RQ2: What are the successes experienced by ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

RQ3: What are the challenges experienced by ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

Conceptual Framework

This study was framed by the concepts of connectivism (Siemens, 2005) and convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006) to examine secondary teachers' experiences using

social media for educational activities. The research questions focused on the experiences of ELA teachers in the United States who facilitate the construction of knowledge through the use of social media networks and how they use social media within their instructional practices to engage students in constructing meaning through these social media applications. The principles of connectivism and the constructs of convergence culture were used to create the interview questions and identify the codes used to analyze the data.

Connectivism (Siemens, 2005) establishes that the digital age involves a method of acquisition and application of knowledge that occurs through the connections made with networks supported by technologies rather than face-to-face human interactions (Canbek & Hargis, 2015; Schaffer, 2015). Through connectivism, learning includes gaining information and using that information to create new knowledge and connections that are shared through peer networks (Canbek & Hargis, 2015; Schaffer, 2015). Collaboration through new technologies provides teachers with novel ways of interacting with their students and connecting their students with learning communities that are not restrained by geographical limitations (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014). These applications provide pathways of communication and the sharing of resources through the connections delivered by social media.

Convergence culture refers to the link among multiple media platforms, participatory culture, and the collective intelligence that results (Jenkins, 2006). Current media applications, particularly social media networks, thrive on audience involvement and discourage passive spectators (Jenkins, 2014). These social media interactions

become part of the fabric of society and create new social norms and expectations as they increase the demand for meaningful participation. Within the domain of education, convergence culture provides a justification and means by which teachers can encourage active participation of students in the learning process through social media networks (Krutka, 2014).

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary ELA teachers in the continental United States who use social media tools for instruction. Through open-ended conversational interviews, I contributed to the knowledge of educational social media use in secondary schools and colleges. The interview questions were written based on the research questions and were developed through the conceptual lenses of connectivism and convergence culture. I initiated the study by reaching out through social media networks with a short online demographic survey to identify 10-15 full-time ELA teachers in the United States who are currently using or have recently used social media networks with their students. After selecting the appropriate participants through purposeful sampling, I engaged in video interviews to gather in-depth information of the experiences of teachers using social media for instruction.

Definitions

The following terms are defined in the context of this qualitative study. Definitions are offered to avoid ambiguity with terms that may have multiple meanings.

21st century skills/competencies: The skills necessary for success in educational pursuits, career goals, and life in the 21st century (Battelle for Kids, 2019a).

Collaboration: Interaction among individuals to share information, often for a common outcome (Balcikanli, 2015).

Collective intelligence: The combined knowledge of a virtual community as developed by the collaboration and communication among its members (Jenkins, 2006).

Communication: A reciprocal exchange and decoding of information, ideas, values, and viewpoints for a variety of purposes (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016a).

Cultural convergence: Cultural behaviors that result from increased and simultaneous flooding of information among media outlets (Jenkins, 2006).

Engagement: Attention and energy spent focused on an activity for the purpose of learning (Duffy & Ney, 2015).

Media: Technological constructs for communication and the social and cultural behaviors linked to those technological constructs (Jenkins, 2006).

Media convergence: The relationship among multiple media systems that allows a free flow of information and takes into account the changing relationship among the technologies that deliver the media and the various industries that produce it as well as the audiences that consume it (Jenkins, 2006).

Participatory culture: A cultural phenomenon in which consumers are encouraged to share in content creation and distribution (Jenkins, 2006).

Social media: Participatory, interactive, Internet-based platforms that allow user-generated content to be shared with other users of the same application (Alabdulkareem, 2015; Bartow, 2014).

Web 2.0: The second generation of Internet functionality, which focuses on user-created content and the value of sharing content within these communities and networks (Alabdulkareem, 2015; Kolokytha, Loutrouki, Valsamidis, & Florou, 2015).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions in my study. Because my initial demographic survey was completed online, I assumed that participants were accurately and honestly representing their demographic characteristics. Also, I assumed that participating teachers provided responses to the interview questions that were accurate and honest, thereby resulting in valid and credible data.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative study was restricted to current full-time ELA teachers of Grades 6 through 12 in the continental United States. The teachers participating in this study had access to and knowledge of social media networks. The participating teachers had used at least one social media network as an educational tool with their students for the purposes of instruction within the past 2 years.

The study was framed by the concepts of connectivism (Siemens, 2005) and convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006). However, I also considered the conceptual framework of social learning theory (Bandura, 1978). Social learning theory posits that learning is a social process in which knowledge is constructed through interactions with

peers by way of observation and modeling (Ainin et al., 2015; Beise & Sherr, 2015). Deaton (2015) asserted that when these social interactions occur through social media, the learning that occurs is reinforced by peer comments and visual aids that can be interacted with synchronously. However, the focus of my research was not on students' learning. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of ELA teachers in the continental United States who use social media tools for instruction. Connectivism was more appropriate for my study because the acquisition and application of knowledge was specific to digital technologies such as social media networks. Convergence culture provided the framework for teachers to justify their use of social media for classroom instruction in the digital age.

Limitations

This study was limited to participants who were amenable to video interviews. To address this limitation, I reached out across multiple online ELA teacher networks with an invitation to the study, which yielded 23 potential participants. Another limitation was that the selected participants were located in different cities across the United States. This created obstacles, both financial and practical, in completing face-to-face interviews. Video conferences were used to alleviate these obstacles; however, there was a potential for scheduling challenges due to time zone differences. To reduce potential scheduling challenges, I limited my study to teachers in the continental United States.

Participants may be teaching in districts and states that have partnered with EdLeader21 (2019) and Battelle for Kids' (2019b, 2019c) SOAR Network or Rural Collaborative Network, recognized for their initiatives in ensuring 21st-century readiness

for their students. This may have created a limitation in the generalizability of my study to all ELA teachers within the United States, particularly to teachers within districts that do not support initiatives for 21st-century educational readiness. Finally, because the participants were currently using or had recently used social media with their students as an educational tool, they may have had preconceived notions as to the value of social media as a tool for educational purposes.

Nine participants completed the interview portion of my study. Although this was a large enough sample size to establish code saturation (Namey, Guest, McKenna, & Chen, 2016) and thematic saturation (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017), it may not be a large enough sample to establish emergent themes or potentially relevant codes. In addition, these nine participants taught in demographically different districts. These circumstances may have influenced their experience, thereby influencing the data.

Significance

Skills such as peer collaboration, technological literacy, critical thinking, and creativity are vital for students as they prepare to enter college and careers in the 21st century (Battelle for Kids, 2019a). In support of the instruction of these skills, Dalsgaard (2016) found that the use of social media as an academic tool actively engaged students in peer-to-peer learning, peer tutoring, and immediate feedback. However, many educators are disinclined to use social media with students as an educational tool for 21st-century competencies (Cimen & Yilmaz, 2017; Matzat & Vrieling, 2016; Osakwe, Nomusa, & Jere, 2016; Yadav & Kharate, 2017). This apparent contradiction in the value

and benefits of social media as an educational tool necessitates more study of the experiences of teachers using social media tools for instruction.

Although the findings from these studies provided a general understanding of the impact and benefits of social media as a learning tool, researchers had not explored the lived experiences of ELA teachers in the United States who use social media as an educational tool. Findings from the current study may inspire positive social change in the field of education by changing teacher perceptions of the value of social media networks as an educational tool. Findings may create the impetus for the alignment of teaching practices to the current needs of the digital age. This study may also reveal best instructional practices for using social media networks as a tool for promoting 21st-century competencies within ELA classrooms.

Summary

Although there was a great deal of information about the use of social media in higher education and in secondary schools from the perspectives of students and teachers, there was a gap in research regarding the experiences of ELA teachers who use social media in their instructional practices. I addressed this gap through a basic qualitative study of ELA teachers in the continental United States who had used or were currently using social media as an educational tool with students. Through the lens of connectivism and convergence culture, I explored ELA teachers' lived experiences of using social media networks for instruction.

Chapter 2 provides a synthesis of research on educational uses of social media from the past 5 years. The articles are presented through key concepts related to the

conceptual frameworks of connectivism and convergence culture. I analyze research that addressed the use of social media as a learning tool, the impact of social media application on teacher communication, relationship building with students, classroom instruction, student engagement, common concerns and challenges, and implications for student learning. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the gaps in the current literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social media networks have been identified as tools for students to practice innovative thinking (Casey & Wells, 2015), collaboration (Rap & Blonder, 2015; Won, Evans, Carey, & Schnittka, 2015), global awareness (Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017), and technology literacies (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Al-Rahmi and Zeki (2017) noted that student motivation and academic resourcefulness were improved when students were not limited by traditional instruction. However, studies have also indicated that teachers are reluctant to use social media networks with students due to concerns that social media networks present a lack of educational value, privacy, and student accessibility (Akcaoglu & Bowman, 2016; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of ELA teachers who use social media tools for instruction.

This chapter presents a review of current literature addressing the themes within this phenomenon. The chapter begins with the strategy for the initial literature search, followed by a discussion of the conceptual lenses through which this problem was examined. The chapter continues with an analysis of the current research addressing the use of social media as an educational tool, specifically within the themes of teaching, learning, and engagement. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature and a review of the current gap in knowledge regarding social media as an educational tool.

Literature Search Strategy

The search for literature began with Walden University's databases, including Education Source, Academic Source Complete, Communication and Mass Media

Complete, ERIC, Health and Psychosocial Instruments, Primary Search, ProQuest, Research Starters, SocINDEX, and Teacher Reference Center. The search included key words such as *classrooms*, *didactics*, *engagement*, *English language arts*, *high schools*, *instructing*, *instruction*, *learning*, *online networks*, *pedagogy*, *secondary schools*, *social media*, *social networks*, *teachers*, *teaching*, *user-generated media*, *Web 2.0*, and *21st century*. I limited my search to peer-reviewed articles published in the last 5 years. In addition, I created search alerts within EBSCO, ProQuest, and Google Scholar to receive the most recent research with the identified key words. Finally, once I had a significant number of current research studies, I used Google Scholar to reverse search articles that were used as references for the literature that was identified in my initial search.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on Jenkins's (2006) convergence culture and Siemens's (2005) connectivism. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of ELA teachers in the continental United States who use social media tools for instruction. Because connectivism and convergence culture address the role of new technologies in the evolution of how individuals learn, communicate, and collaborate within the digital age, I used the constructs of convergence culture and the principles of connectivism to develop the interview instruments and frame the analysis of my study.

Convergence Culture

The concept of a convergence culture focuses mainly on the innovations of communication media and the impact of media platforms on our society. However, with

an ever-growing database for media that allows commentary from the public comes a demand for participation over spectatorship and the creation a collective intelligence within the framework of social media networks (Jenkins, 2006; Krutka, 2014). This new means of interacting within society has generated an educational need within today's youth to prepare them for college and careers in the 21st century.

The concept of convergence culture has three constructs: media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence (Jenkins, 2006). Although not initially understood as an educational theory, the three constructs of convergence culture align with skills critical for students entering into a 21st-century society: media literacy, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration (Battelle for Kids, 2019a). Convergence culture identifies the societal impact of new media technologies, including the potential transformation of classroom instruction.

Media convergence. To understand media convergence within an educational context, individuals first have to accept media within its cultural applications and recognize a definition of media that goes beyond its delivery device. Media is not television, radio, or Internet, but is the communication of and interaction with information. The technology itself is not as important as is how it is used as a communication practice and how it impacts the culture in which it is embedded. Jenkins (2006) noted that current media industries have changed and continue to change how people interact with the media that is produced. This process, the convergence of multiple media outlets, has created a new era of information (Jenkins, 2006).

Because media convergence has created the potential for the oversaturation of media, media literacy has become a curricular necessity to prepare students for college and career in the 21st century (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016a; Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). Media literacy acknowledges media convergence and puts the onus on the student to not simply understand the media communications but to analyze the purpose of the communications (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016a). Moreover, media literacy requires students to evaluate how the media is received by an increasingly diverse audience and how these messages can manipulate values and behaviors (Jenkins, 2006; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016a). Jenkins (2006) agreed with the importance of education in shaping media culture, noting concern with regard to the historical lack of media literacy instruction in classrooms.

Participatory culture. As people experience media convergence and the new cultural norms associated with the continuous influx of information, meaningful participation in the dialogue surrounding that information becomes a new demand of the media. Furthermore, being a consumer of the media is superseded by the value place on being a producer of new content. Although educational emphasis has been on critical thinking and problem-solving as tenets for a 21st-century skill set (Partnership for 21st Century learning, 2016a), a more appropriate stance, given the functionality of Web 2.0 as a platform for user-created content, is to prepare students for meaningful participation beyond the role of critical thinkers to a role of cultural producers (Jenkins, 2006, 2014). Whereas traditional frameworks of education revere teachers as the givers of information and students as the receivers, a convergent culture does not allow for passive

participation or single-direction communication (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Krutka, 2014). Communication becomes a collaborative activity that is part of the learning process heightening student engagement in the content often outside of educational settings (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Jenkins, 2006). This is not to say that the learning that takes place within a participatory culture is less valid that that of the classroom. Rather, a participatory culture reallocates the responsibility of scaffolding of new skills from one teacher to the community as a whole (Jenkins, 2006).

Collective intelligence. The development of a participatory culture has led to virtual knowledge communities that use the individual expertise of their members through collaboration and communication to create a collective intelligence (Jenkins, 2006). However, in schools, open collaboration with regard to student learning and assessment of knowledge has often been tagged as cheating. Schools promote autonomy in learning and problem-solving over debate and deliberation (Jenkins, 2006). Collaborative activities are relegated to specific assignments with the benefits of a collective intelligence deemed inappropriate for student learning, prompting Jenkins (2006) to call for a "new ethic of knowledge sharing" (p. 259).

Connectivism

Learning theories developed prior to the digital age regarded learning as an internal process (Siemens, 2005). The tradition learning theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism explained learning as it relates to the changes that occur within a person as that person experiences new stimuli. Under that idea, the new technologies of the digital age would be seen as simply new stimuli with which to

interact. However, these traditional theories do not account for the living networks that these new technologies provide.

Siemens (2005) observed that as technology has changed the volume and speed at which people are able to receive information require a new perspective of how we learn. Siemens' connectivism highlights the knowledge that exists in external networks to which the populous now has full access. These networks act as learning databases that are external to the learner and outside of the learner's control (Siemens, 2005). However, these networks require the learner to actively foster connections so as to tap into the available expertise found within these databases, changing the ways in which teachers teach and students learn (Canbek & Hargis, 2015).

The databases referred to by Siemens (2005) have evolved since the advent of connectivism. Web 2.0 has brought an expansion of virtual communities and more opportunities for collaboration, providing students and teachers with new networks for learning (Shriram & Warner, 2010). The learning process has become focused externally on the connections made to and within a community of experts, moving the concept of learning away from an internal collection of knowledge to external databases that focus on the ability of the learner to produce new information through the collective intelligence of a knowledge-based network (Canbek & Hargis, 2015). Moreover, these databases move the learning from a teacher-centered model to a student-centered model in which the teacher is the guide through the networks and the learning is not relegated to the classroom.

Social Media as an Instructional Tool

The value of social media as an educational tool comes with the acknowledgment that learning has moved from providing students with a knowledge base to preparing students to be active participants in their society (Gammon & McGranahan, 2015; Jenkins, 2014). Recent studies focused on the educational use of social media are often delineated by grade level, either focusing on secondary education or higher education. Typically, these studies have addressed student use of social media or educational use of social media from the perspective of the educator. Regardless of the location, grade level, or participant pool, when exploring the literature from the past 5 years, I identified several themes within the concept of social media as an instructional tool, including the use of social media for the purpose of communication, building relationships, supporting classroom instruction, encouraging student engagement, and the challenges and concerns when using social media with students.

Communication

Social media as an educational tool for communication has many applications. Teachers have noted the flexibility of dedicated social media groups in reaching students and their families for sharing information about upcoming events, homework or project reminders, or modifications to planned schedules (Asterhan & Rosenburg, 2015; Balcikanli, 2015; Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Persson & Thunman, 2017; Sheldon, 2015). Bartow (2014) explained the value of using social media as a communication tool; as teacher responsibilities increase, social media provides a means by which to manage administrative duties. Similarly, teachers interviewed in Asterhan and Rosenburg's

(2015) study expressed the value of time saved when organizational tasks were relegated to social media platforms. In some cases, the social media platforms provided an organizational resource not available through teachers' school districts (Asterhan & Rosenburg, 2015).

Conversely, students do not always share in the value of using social media platforms to communicate with their instructors. In a study by Smith (2016), undergraduates noted a preference for meeting face-to-face or e-mailing professors with their questions explaining that e-mail was perceived as more professional than social media. Westerman, Daniel, and Bowman (2016) agreed with Smith's finding that although students viewed social media in a positive light, their attitudes regarding face-to-face communication exceeded those of social media communication. However, Sheldon's (2015) study indicated that students appreciated the ability to quickly receive answers to questions they had regarding course content through the use of social media. In agreement with Sheldon (2015), Asterhan and Rosenberg (2015) observed that teachers were more available to provide students with assistance through social media networks. Similarly, Akcayir (2017) found that social media networks helped teachers to reach out to students. Moreover, these online networks were seen as a less intimidating way for students to ask questions without embarrassment (Mudaly, Pithouse-Morgan, van Laren, Singh, & Mitchell, 2015; Sheldon, 2015). Although student preference may vary, social media offers an open line of communication between students and instructors that is less limited by time and exposure than face-to-face interactions.

A final aspect of using social media as an educational tool for communication is in the use of social communication between teachers and students. This has proven to be a controversial topic with its value and appropriateness debated (Asterhan & Rosenburg, 2015; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Sheldon, 2015). Asterhan and Rosenburg (2015) revealed the benefits of connecting with students on noncurricular issues and how those interactions led to deeper personal connections with the students. However, these interactions are accompanied by concerns of weakening boundaries and a confusion of roles (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Sarapin & Morris, 2015; Sheldon, 2015). Teachers' use of deliberate social communication with students through social media networks has provided teachers with new ways of building relationships with their students.

Relationship Building

Building relationships through social media is not limited to the communication that occurs through these networks. In some cases, having access to teachers' social media profiles has helped students see their instructors as more than teachers (Balcikanli, 2015; Sheldon, 2015). Sarapin and Morris (2015) found that professors expected to be viewed as more approachable based on the amount of personal information that the professor shared on his or her social media profile. Imlawi, Gregg, and Karimi (2015) concurred that faculty who shared personal information on social media and connected with students on these networks saw positive educational outcomes from their students. Contrary to the findings of these earlier studies, Akcaoglu and Bowman's (2016) study did not reveal that use of Facebook groups caused students to feel more familiar with

their teachers. However, Akcagoglu & Bowman noted that although not statistically significant, the responses leaned toward social media relationships aiding in relationship building rather than acting as an obstacle.

Social media was also shown to be a device for building relationships beyond the students' academic career. Expanding on the idea of the benefits of non-curricular interactions over social media, Asterhan and Rosenberg's (2015) study noted the potential for long term mentoring relationships when teachers stayed connected to students after they graduated. Similarly, participants in Sheldon's (2015) study expressed the benefit of having a connection on Facebook to someone they viewed as a "good influence" (p. 60). The use of social media to build relationships with students extends beyond the immediate application within the classroom to providing students with a long-term support system (Sheldon, 2015).

It is important to note that relationship development within social media is not solely between the instructor and the student. Social media has an application to student to student relationship building (Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). Tuzel and Hobbs (2017) revealed that students working virtually with peers in another country developed relationships through the use of social media applications that transcended their cultural differences. Smith (2016) saw similar reflections from participants who found benefit from their student to student interactions. Regardless of how teachers use social media to build relationships with students, using these virtual networks with students provides the students with a sense of community, both virtually (Balcikanli, 2015; Carpenter &

Krutka, 2014; Schwarz & Caduri, 2016) and within the classroom (Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Schwarz & Caduri, 2016).

Instruction

Beyond organizational uses and the benefits that come with the capacity for flexible communication, studies have revealed the implications of social media when used for classroom instruction. Daniels and Billingsley (2014) noted that one result of the inundation of social media networks and their educational potential is the prospective change in teacher role from that of an instructor to one of student resource. Although Rap and Blonder (2016) recognized the change in the role of the teacher when social media applications are employed for instruction, their study showed that the teacher is essential to encouraging students to participate in academic discussions through social networks. The importance of the teacher role for discussion facilitation in social media networks was further supported in studies by Won, Evans, Carey, and Schnittka (2015) and Cooke (2017). Teacher roles may change when social media is utilized, but they are no less important in the learning process (Cooke, 2017; Rap & Blonder, 2016; Won et al., 2015).

Additionally, researchers have found a connection to teaching with social media for the purposes of connecting students linking back to the framework of Jenkins's (2006) convergence culture. Tuzel and Hobbs (2017) noted the importance of empowering students with a **"**civic voice**"** (p. 64), similar to Jenkins's concept of participatory culture. Mudaly, Pithouse-Morgan, van Laren, Singh, and Mitchell (2015) also linked to civics education and a participatory culture through a construct of teaching science through social relevancy. Their study utilized social media and digital

technologies to explore instruction of science within a design of social responsibility to the planet (Mudaly et al., 2015). Greenhow and Askari (2015) explored similar concepts noting the impact of students participating in a virtual learning community as they generate and share new material.

Nonetheless, several researchers found that although social media networks provide the potential for students to actively engage in the creation of new information, these networks are not used in this way (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Mudaly et al., 2015; Popa & Rogozea. 2017). Manca and Ranieri's (2016) study found that teachers using social media as part of their instruction used it for visual references rather than to have students create new information. These results were mirrored in Popa and Rogozea's (2017) study as the creation of new data was found to be the least utilized skill when professors used social media for instruction. Mudaly et al. (2015) focused on the use of the visual media aspect of social media. However, the participants in their study perceived the visual reference as creative and engaging rather than as a limitation (Mudaly et al., 2015).

Recent studies focused on particular subjects of instruction. However, within these studies the perspective of the research varied. Studies of social media use within the science classroom were predominant within the current literature. Rap & Blonder (2015) evaluated student learning of chemistry concepts through conversations over social media platforms. Karahan & Roehrig (2016) sought to understand the connection between social media and student engagement and motivation in a high school environmental science class within an alternative school. Becker and Bishop (2016) outlined their practices of

using Twitter to enhance their middle school science curriculum. Although not a formal study, Becker and Bishop elaborate on one science teachers' experience with social use as part of an instructional practice.

Studies of social media use within social studies classrooms were also prevalent. Kahveci (2015) found inconsistencies in the perceptions of instructional social media usage by preservice social studies teachers. Social media networks were noted to have potential benefits and negative impacts (Kahveci, 2015). Krutka (2014) also examined educational social media through the views of preservice social studies teachers. However, Krutka focused on the broader impact of social media use within a social studies methods' classroom.

Studies within ELA classrooms were less common. Similar to Kahveci (2015) and Krutka (2014), Balcikanli (2015) also investigated preservice teachers. Balcikanli explored the connection between the purpose and adoption of Facebook use with the educational use of Facebook by potential English language teachers in Turkey. Rust (2015) evaluated how adolescents within a midwestern ELA classroom shaped their identities through the use of a social media network as a virtual classroom space. Karal, Kokoc, and Cakir (2017) examined the writing outcomes of Turkish students when social media was used as an instructional tool within their literature class. However, in each of these three studies, the focus of the research was not on the instruction or experiences of ELA teachers. Articles by Barnwell (2018) and Loomis (2018) recount their teaching experiences with social media within their ELA classrooms and provide potential best practices. Nonetheless, although these articles chronical the authors' observations when

using social media with students for the purposes of ELA instruction, the conclusions by these authors are not based on empirical research.

Student Engagement

The findings of recent research revealed that social media networks encouraged student engagement (Al-Rahmi & Zeki, 2017; Chai & Fan, 2016; Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia, & Chang, 2015; Bozanta & Mardikyan, 2017; Rap & Blonder, 2016). Rap and Blonder (2016) noted that using social media as an educational tool encouraged students to actively engage into the learning process. Similarly, Bozanta and Mardikyan (2017) found that using social media within the curriculum enhanced the students' engagement into the course as a whole including their collaborations with peers and faculty. Many researchers found that the inclusion of social media into the instruction resulted in improved engagement over traditional methods (Al-Rahmi & Zeki, 2017; Chai & Fan, 2016; Hamid et al., 2015).

Studies on student engagement when social media was used revealed that intention within the planning of the activity is vital to student engagement (Duffy & Ney, 2015; Schwarz & Caduri, 2016). To encourage students to engage significantly in the learning activities that includes social media the activities must provide relevant resources and experts or authority figures with which to interact (Schwarz & Caduri, 2016). In agreement with these findings, Duffy and Ney (2015) found that to ensure student engagement, teachers must plan the activities to align the learning outcomes to the social media applications that have academic application that is clear to the students.

As was the case in several of the themes covered in this literature review, there were contradictions in the results of recent research studies. Cooke (2017) found that the inclusion of social media into the learning activities did not impact student motivation or engagement. These results contradict earlier findings of Tur and Marin (2015) who noted that using social media in and educational activity did encourage and motivate students to engage in the activity. One reason for this discrepancy may be the extent to which the teacher was engaged in the activity. As seen previously, instructor involvement in the social media network activity continued to play a factor in student outcomes (Cooke, 2017).

Challenges and Concerns

Regardless of the benefits of using social media as an instructional tool, researchers are prudent to point out the challenges inherently tied to social media. One of the concerns addressed most frequently by researchers is the waning boundary between the student and the teacher when social media networks are engaged as part of instructional practices (Gammon & McGranahan, 2015; Gettman & Cortijo**,** 2015; Manca & Ranieri, 2015; Rap & Blonder, 2016; Sheldon, 2015; Smith, 2016). This concern over boundaries is multi-directional with both teachers and students sharing concerns over the exposure of their private lives (Rap & Blonder, 2016). Studies have shown that students desire to keep social lives, as they exist in the virtual world, separate from their academic lives (Gammon & McGranahan, 2015; Manca & Ranieri, 2017). Participants in Gettman and Cortijo**'**s (2015) study expressed the desire to keep Facebook for their social interactions solely and not to interact with their professors or for academics. Sheldon

(2015) also noted students' belief that the relationship they had with their professors should be kept professional and that social media networks did not reflect a professional relationship. Smith (2016) identified one caveat to the students' desire for separation between social and academic lives. Students reveals that they would prefer a dedicated student network for academic, rather than a virtual space that was for students and teachers (Smith, 2016).

Perhaps one reason for this push from some students to keep their academic and social lives separate is the students' awareness of their own capacity for distraction. Gettman and Cortijo (2015) revealed that students using social media for academic purposes worried about getting distracted by these applications. Students in Kolokytha, Loutrouki, Valsamidis, and Florou's (2015) study revealed that when using social media they respond immediately to messages within the application from friends and family, validating the potential for distraction. Teachers shared in this concern. Qayyum, Hussain, Mahmood, and Rasool (2016) noted that teachers were concerned that if they used social media for instructional purposes, students would misuse their time meant for academic assignments and focus instead on the social aspect of the application.

Another aspect researchers revealed with regard to boundaries is the impact to the work-life balance. Although social media allowed students to have more access to their teachers for assistance and support, the teachers struggled to maintain a separation between their work life and their private life (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015; Sarapin & Morris, 2015). Although the challenge to maintain a healthy balance between one's work life and personal life is not unique to teachers using social media, the introduction of

social media to instructional practices did contribute to this struggle (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015; Sarapin & Morris, 2015).

Another challenge related to boundaries that teachers and students faced when social media was introduced to the curriculum was a confusion over the previously understood roles (Sheldon, 2015). Asterhan & Rosenberg (2015) explained this role ambiguity through the consideration of a teacher as an authority figure versus a teacher as a friend. Confusing this issue more was the naming conventions of connections within social media networks (Georgakainas and Zaharias, 2016; Manca & Ranieri, 2017). For example, Facebook connections are called "friends," which complicates the established roles of teacher and student (Manca & Ranieri, 2017). Manca and Ranieri (2017) reported that within social media networks, the expectations of interpersonal relationships between students and teachers are reassessed. However, Akcayir (2017) found that teachers were hesitant to alter their roles with students. It was important to note the ease in which this concern could be mitigated. In a study by Georgakainas and Zaharias (2016), Greek teachers were able to assuage this concern by not using social media networks with students that require "friending" in order to share information within the network.

Privacy was a prevalent concern noted among researchers. Akcayir (2017) revealed that privacy was the most significant factor preventing college faculty from utilizing social media within their courses. Similarly, Owen, Fox, and Bird (2016) noted that mitigating privacy issues was a priority for teachers in England in deciding the ways in which they would incorporate social media into their instructional practices, if at all. Manca and Ranieri (2017) tied the privacy issue back to maintaining boundaries,

suggesting that the concerns surrounding privacy justified a separation of academic and social lives. Greenhow and Askari (2015) suggested the issue of privacy beyond personal protection to putting the onus on the teacher to safeguard the privacy of their students.

Synopsis of challenges and concerns. The list of concerns noted are not independent from the other themes discussed. Challenges of maintaining boundaries between private social lives and academic lives were embedded in the application of social media as a tool for education, as a tool for instruction, and as a pathway for building relationships with students. Likewise, protecting privacy was challenged when using social media for instruction, or communication, or to build relationships. Each of the concerns noted by teachers and students should not be understood to be mutually exclusive from the way in which a teacher used social media.

Perceptions versus reality. Throughout the literature reflecting teacher concerns was the contradiction between perception and reality. In a study by Manca and Ranieri (2016), the researchers exposed a list of perceived concerns including low usefulness and high risk that were not reflected in other studies. Similarly, Rap and Blonder (2016) revealed a perception of low safety. In Akcayir's (2017) study, it was not clear whether faculty had actually experienced breeches in privacy, causing them to refrain from using social media, or if they merely had a fear of a lack of privacy. This is not to say that the fears or negative perceptions of teachers and college faculty are unfounded. However, there is an important distinction to make between a perceived challenge or concern and an experienced challenge or concern. Understanding the lived experiences, including the challenges faced, by teachers using social media provides clarity to practice. Through

this clarity is an opportunity to mitigate the challenges faced instead of refraining from the technology altogether based on perceived obstacles.

Learning

Although learning is typically an educational activity within the student, a discussion of teaching would be inadequate without its learning counterpart. Within the current research, student learning as a theme focused on the views and experiences of the student when social media is used as an educational tool. Within this theme, several sub-themes emerged in the literature from the past five years, including student-centered learning, critical thinking, collaboration, and academic achievement.

Student-centered learning. Studies recognize the importance of transitioning from teacher centered instruction to student centered instruction in order to create learners who are able to take ownership over their academic lives (Matzat & Vrieling, 2016). Aligning with the value of student-centered learning was the concept of student autonomy. Smith (2016) described the concept of student autonomy through the value of student choice noting that students make decisions about their level of educational interaction with peers on social media. Schwarz and Caduri (2016) also noticed a common theme of student autonomy in the narratives of their study explaining how the students in each of the narratives were able to make decisions about their learning throughout their social media interactions. The student participants in Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia, and Chang's (2015) study reflected on the ease of directing their own academic experiences through social media. These examples of self-directed learning show how social media changes the student learning experience.

Critical thinking. Critical thinking has been identified as an essential skill for preparing students to be successful in college and the workforce in the digital age (The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016a). To this end, Hamid et al. (2015) noted that when participants created and shared content, they were more judicious and discriminating as they considered what they were offering to their learning community. This increased deliberation when participating in learning activities changes the level of scholarship for the student from interpreting current concepts to creating new ideas (Casey & Wells, 2015; Rap & Blonder, 2016). It is notable that a more recent study by Cooke (2017) found inconsistency in student involvement in the learning process when using social media. However, Cooke explained that this may be due to inconsistencies in student experiences resulting from varying involvement of the instructor, further stressing the importance of teacher participation with students when using social media for learning activities.

Collaboration. Another vital skill students need in preparation for success in the digital age is collaboration (The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016a). Bozanta and Mardikyan (2017) revealed that the educational use of social media was enhanced by the exchanges among students which led to a positive influence on academic collaboration and aligned with a previous study by Karahan and Roehrig (2016) which divulged that students expressed having a clearer understand of the content through the peer to peer communications that occurred through social media networks. Studies by Casey and Wells (2015) examined these benefits through collaborative activities within social media networks that encouraged constructive feedback and informal information

sharing among students. The social media networks offer a flexibility of time and location that helped to open up the collaborative opportunities for students (Hamid et al., 2015).

Although these informal collaborations were prevalent, social media networks were not limited to informal cooperative activities. These networks offered multitude of avenues for collaboration and the sharing of knowledge among students (Al-Rahmi & Zeki, 2017; Balcikanli, 2015; Mudaly et al., 2015). Schwarz and Caduri (2016) observed that social media provided ways for teachers to develop learning assignments that intentionally foster collaboration. In addition, collaboration among students and their instructors through social media provided new prospects for the modeling of learning behaviors (Alsaied, 2017; Casey and Wells, 2015). Collaborative learning, therefore, was not limited to instructional content but had value in guiding students through behaviors that led to academic success.

These formal opportunities for student to student learning result in the formation of academically based communities for students (Rap & Blonder, 2016). Within these communities, students may help develop the collective intelligence of those communities through the participatory construction of knowledge (Mudaly et al., 2015; Won et al., 2015). Becker and Bishop (2016) reflected on the benefits of Twitter in its ability to provide students with opportunities to participate with an "authentic audience" (p. 6). The potential for collaborative learning within social networks among students, instructors, and experts in their fields corroborated the value of the collective intelligence and participatory culture within social media (Jenkins, 2006).

There is some indication that students prefer informal collaborations to those monitored by instructors. In comparison to school run Learning Management Systems (LMS), Dalsgaard (2016) found that students preferred to utilize social media networks to get help from their peers rather than contact their instructor through the LMS. The results of Dalsgaard's (2016) study supported the findings of Smith (2016) who noted that students preferred a dedicated student network for academic instead of virtual networks that included teachers. However, as noted previously, there was an improvement in student participation and collaboration when teachers were present and able to facilitate the learning within the social media networks (Carpenter, 2014).

Achievement. Although increased instances of critical thinking and collaboration are valuable learning achievements in their own right, studies have also delved into the impact to students' academic performance when social media networks are introduced to coursework. Cimen and Yimez (2017) revealed that students in an experimental group wherein social media networks were used to support instruction showed the highest achievement of all three experimental groups. These results were similar to a previous study by Lambic (2016) which showed a positive correlation between social media usage for learning and academic performance. Conversely, a study by Lau (2017) showed no change in student grade point average (GPA) with social media usage. However, Lau explained that in this study social media usage was not limited to educational usage and the participants of the study used social media primarily for non-academic reasons. Nonetheless, a study by Qayyum et al. (2016) revealed elementary level students in Pakistan who used social media had slightly grades than those that did not use social

media. Qayyum et al. did not note whether the social media used was solely for educational purposes.

Gap in the Literature

The recent research literature of the educational use of social media is considerable although limited in its scope due to the limited studies of the lived experiences of teachers using social media as an educational tool. Fox and Bird (2017) recommended more research to provide the information teachers require to feel competent using social media as an educational tool. Gammon and McGranahan (2015) outlined effective practices and recommendations for teachers wanting to use social media. However, they noted the lack of actual case study data on the successful use of social media. Greenhow and Askari (2015) also identified the gap in the research of best practices for connecting social media to pedagogy and further emphasized the value of learning from the lived experiences of teachers using social media in their classrooms.

In addition to the gap in the research of teacher experiences, there is a gap in specific content areas. Authors of recent studies evaluate social media as a tool for learning and teaching across many populations including secondary school teachers across various subject areas (Becker & Bishop, 2016; Karahan & Roehrig, 2016; Karal, Kokoc, & Cakir,2017; Rap & Blonder, 2015; Rust, 2015). However, studies conducted within the past five years in specific academic subjects are overwhelmingly focused on the social and physical sciences rather than the humanities. The current literature of ELA teachers is deficient of studies of teachers' lived experiences as they use social media for instruction (Karal, Kokoc, & Cakir, 2017; Rust, 2015). Furthermore, nearly all of the

researchers address, to varying degrees, teachers' or students' concerns with social media as an educational tool. However, in studies that looked at the decision to use social media with students, many of the concerns noted by teachers as reason why they choose not to use social media are perceived challenges and not actual lived challenges (Akcayir, 2017; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Qayyum, Hussain, Mahmood, & Rasool, 2016; Rap & Blonder, 2016). There is a gap in the research literature exploring the lived experiences of secondary ELA teachers in the United States who are currently using or have recently used social media as an instructional tool.

Summary and Conclusions

Over the past five years, the research literature on the use of social media as an educational tool for teachers to use with students has revealed several themes including teacher use of social media for communicating with students and building relationships with students. Most of the research also included a discussion of the concerns and challenges teachers face when using social media for educational purposes. Additionally, the researchers also exposed additional themes focused on the students learning with social media including critical thinking, collaboration, achievement, and engagement.

There is a great deal of inconsistency in the current research on the educational use of social media. The research is clear on how social media can be used for educational purposes. However, the impact of social media on teaching and learning is not clear. On one hand, studies show the benefits of using social media for communication. On the other hand, studies show that students do not necessarily want to be connected to teachers through social media. Based on current research, social media

either increases student engagement or has no impact. Similar inconsistencies can be found with regard to student achievement. However, one quality researchers do agree on is that teacher engagement is key to the successful application of social media. The more involved the instructor is in the social media instructional activity, the greater the educational benefit to the students.

Recent studies examining high school teachers using social media with their students do not address the experiences of ELA teachers in secondary schools in the United States. This study addresses this gap by exploring the lived experiences of ELA teachers in the United States who use social media as an instructional tool. This study extends the knowledge of the discipline by examining a population that currently is missing in the literature. In addition, because this study explored the lived experiences of this population, it revealed information about the actual challenges faced by ELA teachers when using social media rather than rely on the perceived challenges of teachers. Within the recent research, there is notable attention paid to the concerns of educators with regard to using social media with students. However, in many of these discussions, it is not clear if the concerns are based on the actual experiences of the teachers or perceived concerns. This study revealed more information about the challenges ELA teachers actually face when using social media with students and provided resolutions to common concerns.

To address the gap in the literature, I used a basic qualitative methodology to explore the lived experiences of ELA teachers in United States who are currently using or have recently used social media as an instructional tool. Chapter 3 presents my research

design and rationale, followed by my role as the researcher in this study. I discuss the methodology I used, including participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and my data analysis plan. Chapter 3 ends with a discussion of how addressed issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of ELA teachers who use social media tools for instruction. This chapter includes the research design and rationale followed by an exploration of my role as the researcher. Next, I describe the methodology of my study, including participant selection, instrumentation, procedures, and my data analysis plan. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

My study of the lived experiences of ELA teachers using social media was guided by three research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of secondary school ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

RQ2: What are the successes experienced by ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

RQ3: What are the challenges experienced by ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

The central phenomenon addressed in this study was the use of social media networks as a learning tool by secondary ELA teachers. I examined teachers' experiences using social media networks for instructional purposes. Using a basic qualitative approach, I interviewed secondary ELA teachers in the continental United States who were using or had recently used social media as an educational tool with students. I first used a short online survey to identify appropriate participants based on their content area,

grade level, and use of social media with students. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with nine teachers who had self-identified as using or having recently used social media with their students as a teaching tool.

Patton (2015) distinguished the qualitative approach as one in which researchers explore the stories and perspectives of the participants. Simon and Goes (2018) explained that a qualitative approach accounts for multiple answers to a single question, whereas a quantitative approach is used to find the single or most common answer. In this study, I sought to understand the experiences of secondary ELA teachers who use social media networks as instructional tools, including their successes and challenges. Through in-depth interviews, I explored the participants' experiences when using social media in their classrooms, the solutions to challenges faced, and the best practices that the teachers developed from these experiences. A quantitative approach would not have allowed for a thorough exploration of the teachers' experiences, perceptions, challenges, and successes when using social media for instruction. Therefore, a quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study. Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015) noted that a basic qualitative approach is appropriate when the researcher has prior knowledge of the phenomenon to be explored but seeks to examine the participants perspectives in-depth to expand on that knowledge.

Before deciding on a basic qualitative approach, I considered several other qualitative approaches including ethnography, phenomenology, case study, and narrative inquiry. Patton (2015) explained ethnography as an anthropological approach that focuses on the culture created by people experiencing, living, and/or working within a particular

phenomenon. Similar to Patton's (2015) assertion that contemporary societal phenomena can be studied using this method, Robson (2016) describes digital ethnography as exploring the ways in which culture is created in a virtual community. Patton (2015) identified the Information Age culture as a phenomenon of modern day society, and teachers who engage in digital technologies can be identified as a subgroup of that culture, justifying an exploration of the commonalities in their perceptions about learning and instruction in a digital world. However, the participants in the current study included individuals from a range of grade levels, years of experience, and school district locations. Therefore, there were not enough commonalities among the participant teachers in this study to justify a labeling these teachers as a culture-sharing group.

Sloan and Bowe (2014) regarded phenomenology as a means by which a researcher may convert the human experience of a phenomenon into the essence of that phenomenon. Phenomenological researchers, however, take the study of these experiences a step further to the creation of meaning from these experiences (Patton, 2015; van Manen, 2016). As noted by van Manen (2016), the phenomena are not explored through passive experience, but rather within the awareness that the participants have as they live within the phenomenon of study. However, I did not seek to determine the essence of teaching with social media. Rather, the research focused on the conclusions drawn by the teachers who have used these technologies in their instructional practices.

Yin (2018) described several characteristics relevant to case study methodology. First, the study's research should focus on a current phenomenon with research questions

that are directed toward the how or why of the phenomenon. Yin also noted that case studies are warranted when the researcher is seeking real-world knowledge of the phenomenon. Although I explored the real-world knowledge of the teachers using social media with students, the focus of the study was not on how or why the teachers use social media. Instead, the research questions were directed toward understanding the experiences of teachers as they use social media networks with students, rendering a case study design inappropriate for this study.

Narrative inquiry relies on the analysis of stories to uncover the experiences surrounding the phenomenon of study (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) described narrative inquiry as a method to expose the cultural element within a participant's experience. Although social media has impacted social patterns, particularly for communication, the focus of this study was not on the cultural revelations that may be seen through the experiences of teachers using social media. This distinction in purpose of methodology rendered narrative inquiry inappropriate for this study.

Role of the Researcher

Most of my teaching career has been spent as a secondary ELA teacher. However, my teaching experiences have been in one geographic location within the United States. I did not have any personal or professional relationship with my participants, and none were from my geographic area. Although I have held supervisory roles in a private online school in the United States, all of the participants were from brick-and-mortar schools.

For this study, my role was to collect data, observe and take notes during interviews, and code and analyze the data. Data collection included in-depth interviews

with the participants. I was the sole point of contact for the initial survey and the interviews. Although the transcription of the interviews included an online automated transcription service, I was responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the transcription through a manual review of the transcripts. I also had the sole responsibility for analysis and interpretation of the collected data. Because I was the sole researcher for this study, I was vigilant in managing any potential biases (see Patton, 2015). Van Manen (2016) asserted that within phenomenological research, biases are necessary to the researcher's understanding provided that the researcher is mindful of these preconceived notions. Although I did not conduct a phenomenological study, I used self-reflection through a reflexive research journal to identify and mitigate any biases.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

My initial target group was secondary ELA teachers in one region of the United States who had used or were currently using social media as a learning tool. This region had the potential to provide a rich base of technology-driven teachers because most of the states were identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2016b) as having a strong dedication to preparing students for 21st-century jobs. However, a lack of responses to my study invitations necessitated the removal of this geographic barrier. With IRB approval, my target group became secondary ELA teachers in the continental United States who had used or were currently using social media as a learning tool.

Regarding the determination of sample size in qualitive studies, data saturation is the expected standard. In a study comparing in-depth interviews and focus groups,

Namey et al. (2016) found that 80-90% thematic saturation could be reached between eight and 16 in-depth interviews. Similarly, Hennink et al. (2017) confirmed that code saturation could be reached in nine interviews. For the current study, data analysis included a priori coding based on the conceptual frameworks of connectivism and convergence culture. I aimed for a sample of 10-15 teachers to participate in my study. Fifteen participants would allow for potential voluntarily withdrawals from the study without a significant impact on the likelihood of achieving data saturation. After opening my study up to ELA teachers in the continental United States, 22 ELA teachers (and one mathematics teacher) responded to my demographic survey, and 21 potential participants indicated that they would be open to participating in the interview. Of those 21 potential participants, nine completed an interview.

There were several criteria for participant selection. One criterion was that the participant must be a secondary ELA teacher. For the purposes of this study, secondary was defined as Grades 6 through 12. A second criterion was that the participant must teach in a brick-and-mortar school located in the continental United States. In addition, the participants must have used social media with their students as an educational tool within the past 2 years.

Participants self-identified as meeting the selection criteria through a short online survey (see Appendix A). This survey identified participants' grade level and use of social media with students, including frequency and social media networks used. Participants were contacted through 57 closed Facebook groups dedicated to secondary teachers, with some groups dedicated to secondary ELA teachers. In addition, I posted

the invitation and survey link to my Twitter and LinkedIn accounts when the invitations to the closed Facebook groups did not provide enough participants for my study.

Instrumentation

I conducted interviews through an online video meeting application with the participants using interview questions based on my research questions and developed using the lenses of connectivism and convergence culture (see Appendix B). The interview protocol was assessed for content validity by a review of a panel of experts consisting of one doctoral-level research professor with expertise in qualitative research, one doctoral-level research professor with expertise in educational technology and technology integration into K-12 classrooms, and two doctoral-level research professors with expertise in innovational instructional methods and 21st-century learning. This expert panel reviewed the interview questions for clarity and to ensure they aligned with the research questions and the data I would be collecting. Panelists' feedback was incorporated into the final data collection instrument. Table 1 shows which interview questions addressed which research questions.

Table 1

Interview Questions and Research Question Alignment

Interview questions	Background	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3
Question 1	X			
Question 2	X			
Question 3	X			
Question 4		X		
Question 5		X		
Question 6		X		
Question 7		X		
Question 8				X
Question 9				X
Question 10			X	
Question 11		X	X	X

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Teachers were invited to participate in the study through social media networks. I posted an invitation and informed consent form to 57 closed Facebook groups dedicated to secondary teachers or secondary ELA teachers. I also posted the invitation and informed consent form to my LinkedIn and Twitter accounts and allowed for sharing. The invitation included a short survey to identify the participating teachers' grade level, content area, and frequency of social media use within their instruction. Using a purposeful sampling strategy, I interviewed nine participants once, with each interview ranging from 30 to 90 minutes. Immediately after completing each interview, I sent each

participant a $10 Barnes and Noble gift card, along with a message expressing my appreciation for their participation and their time. Each interview occurred virtually within an online Zoom meeting room. All interviews were video recorded with the Zoom application. Once my dissertation is approved, I will send each participant a one-page summary of the results of my study.

Data Analysis Plan

Interview guide. The sole data collection tool was the in-depth interviews with the participants (see Appendix B). The first three interview questions addressed the participants' background and comfort level with new technologies. Although this information was important, the purpose of these first few questions was to establish a comfort level with the participants before delving into the questions that addressed the research questions. Interview Questions 4 through 7 aligned with the first research question and gave the participants the opportunity to discuss their experiences using social media for instruction, social media use in a participatory culture, using the content area expertise within social media networks, and contributing to a collective intelligence. Interview Questions 8 and 9 connected to Research Question 3 regarding the challenges faced by teachers using social media for instruction. Interview Question 10 was tied to Research Question 2 concerning the successes experienced when using social media with students. Interview Question 11 provided an opportunity for teachers to share additional information that further contributed to answering each of the research questions.

Codes and categories. My initial analysis of the transcripts focused on concepts and themes that are prevalent within the conceptual lenses of convergence culture and

connectivism. Specifically, I isolated the concepts of learning within a participatory culture, contributing to a collective intelligence, utilizing external databases, and student-centered teaching models. In addition, I looked for themes connected to overcoming common challenges with the instructional use of social media that have been noted in previous research. Although these were the codes that will guide my initial analysis of the data, additional themes emerged and were included in the final analysis such as *code-switching challenges*, *exposure to global perspectives*, *meaningful instructional application*, *teaching valuable participation*, and *real-world application*.

QDA software. There are several factors that played a role in the consideration of Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software. Because I solely use a MacBook, Mac compatibility was a priority. I looked for software that was noted for ease of use with its user interface and online video tutorials. Within the capabilities of the application, I preferred QDA software that allowed for the importing and analysis of multiple types of data. In addition, I wanted to have the option to present or organize the data in ways that are visually appealing. With these criteria in mind, my research led me to MAXQDA.

One of the benefits of MAXQDA (2018) is in its ability to digitally examine multiple types of data, including video/audio without first using a transcription service. In addition, data can be imported from various file extensions. MAXQDA also has many online video tutorials and user manuals available. There is a team sharing capability that was beneficial in sharing my coding with my dissertation committee. MAXQDA has a user-friendly interface and multiple choices for visual representations of data. There are options for color coding, symbolic coding, and emoticons (MAXQDA, 2018). The

options for visual representation of the data allowed for the creation of word clouds, document portraits, and term mapping.

Issues of Trustworthiness

One factor in assessing the merit of any study is in evaluating its trustworthiness through a combined set of components that answer potential concerns of validity, reliability, and objectivity. In qualitative studies, these elements are addressed through a discussion of the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004).

Credibility

Shenton (2004) aligned credibility with internal validity or the assurance that the research study is actually assessing that which it is meant to test. For my study, I addressed the issue of credibility in several ways. Working with my chair and methodologist, as well as my university peers, I had continued debriefings and peer scrutiny of my work (see Astroth & Chung, 2018; Shenton, 2004). Through the literature review, I also had a strong understanding of previous scholarly research in which to evaluate my work against (see Shenton, 2004; van Manen, 2016). In addition, I engaged an expert panel to review and critique my data collection tool (interview guide) in order to ensure that my interview questions would stimulate responses to answer my research questions.

One potential issue with credibility in all qualitative research is the potential bias of the researcher. Although bias may be necessary in that it notes a pre-understanding of

the phenomenon of study, it is crucial that the researcher be "self-reflectively aware" (van Manen, 2016, p. 353). Therefore, I employed a reflexive journal throughout my research.

Transferability

To address the concerns of transferability within my study, the boundaries, scope, and delimitations of the study were clearly and extensively outlined. In addition to a thorough explanation of the phenomenon of interest, I provided generous descriptions of the participants' experience so as to guide the readers to their own inferences of transferability (see Shenton, 2004). Although the participant selection is limited to secondary ELA teachers in the continental United States, I provided variation in participant selection through variance in grade level and social media networks used. I did not use the participants' gender, age, or years of experience as identifiers which allowed for a random selection of these demographics.

Dependability

Dependability is another challenging factor for my study because the phenomenon of interest—social media as a learning tool—is fairly new within the field of education. As such, there is a sense of evolution within this topic. Nonetheless, this study has a strong descriptive nature within its explanation of the methodology and design, allowing others to repeat the study (see Shenton, 2004). I asked each participant to review their interview transcripts to ensure that I had accurately recorded their experiences. In addition, I used standardized systematic coding to ensure inter-rater reliability (see Astroth & Chung, 2018). Finally, I kept detailed and copious audit trails and notes during

and after each interview, as well as during my analysis of the data collected (see Astroth & Chung, 2018).

Confirmability

A significant amount of confirmability was available through the presence of a solid audit trail and reflection process (see Shenton, 2004). As noted above, kept a reflection journal to keep me self-aware of any bias or challenges to the objectivity of my research, which provided transparency to the impact these may have to my study (see Astroth & Chung, 2018). I also had a detailed audit trail of my data collection and analysis processes.

Ethical Procedures

After obtaining IRB approval from Walden University (Walden IRB approval no. 12-24-18-0513934), I began recruiting participants for my study and collected interview data using the procedures outlined above and in the IRB application. Because I was gathering participants from social media groups across several states and outside of any teachers' specific workplace, I did not need institutional permissions from the teachers' specific school districts. The teachers' participation was confidential. Contacting their individual school districts to obtain consent for a specific teachers' participation would have jeopardized the confidentiality of their responses as the participants described their usage of social media tools in ways that would have been identifiable to their administrators if the administrators were aware of their participation.

Participant confidentiality in their involvement and responses was conveyed to the participants during the invitation stage within the informed consent form and at the start of each interview. Throughout this dissertation I refer to the participants using pseudonyms. No identifying characteristics were revealed within the study.

Potential participants had an opportunity to ask questions prior to giving consent and throughout the interview process. In addition, participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time.

All interview video recordings and transcripts were stored on my laptop and password protected. The digital transcription service I used is also protected through encryption and a unique login and password. The data collected was accessible only to my committee and me. The data is currently stored on a USB storage device in a locked box safe in my home office and will be destroyed after five years.

Summary

Chapter 3 explored my research plans for my qualitative study on the lived experiences of secondary ELA teachers using social media networks as instructional tools. I had the sole responsibility for data collection and analysis. I interviewed nine secondary ELA teachers invited from several social media network groups. Finally, I have outlined the steps I took in order to ensure trustworthiness within my research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of ELA teachers use social media as an instructional tool. In this chapter, I provide a review of the research questions and identify the setting and participant demographics. Next, I outline my process for data collection and explain my analysis of the data. I provide evidence of trustworthiness and conclude with the results of the research.

This study was guided by three research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of secondary school ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

RQ2: What are the successes experienced by ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

RQ3: What are the challenges experienced by ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

Setting

Each participant was interviewed in her own environment as the interviews took place virtually. At the time of the interviews there were some negative organizational conditions that may have influenced the participants' experiences using social media. One participant worked in a school in which the state's department of education had retained control over the schools' curriculum due to poor achievement. This may have influenced her reflections regarding her experiences using social media as an instructional tool because, as she noted, using it was not part of the state-approved curriculum.

With regard to the type and demographic of the school the participant taught in (see Table 2), this information was volunteered and not part of my interview questions. However, this information is included because the setting of the school appeared to be a factor in some of the participants' responses, specifically when discussing access to technology and administrative support. Further study is needed to determine whether this influence was directly based on the demographic of the school or based on the participants' perceptions.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

Participant pseudonyms used	Grade level(s)	Years teaching	Public/private school (previous noted)	Description of current school
Ms. Adams	10, 11, 12	1	Public	Rural
Ms. Boone	8, 9	3	Public	Rural
Ms. Charles	7	4.5	Private	Catholic
Ms. Denton	8	21	Public	Affluent
Ms. Evans	6, 7, 8, 9, 10	10	Public	Urban
Ms. Fellows	7, 9, 10, 11	7	Public	Rural
Ms. George	9, 10, 11	6	Private	All girl
Ms. Havers	7, 12	15	Public	Not disclosed
Ms. Isaacs	7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	5	Private	Not disclosed

Demographics

At the time of data collection, each participant was a full-time secondary ELA teacher within a public or private, brick-and-mortar school district. As shown in Table 2,

the participants' level of experience ranged from a first-year teacher to a teacher of 21 years. Six of the participants taught in public districts, and three taught in private schools. One of the teachers had recently switched from a private school to a public school and another had recently switched from a public school to a private school. The participating teachers represented schools in rural, urban, and suburban areas with varying degrees of poverty or affluence. The demographics of the schools were not part of the initial survey questions. However, the participants offered this information during the interviews.

Data Collection

Participants

I aimed for 15 potential participants with an expectation that at least 10 would complete an interview. The social media invitations resulted in 23 responses, and 21 teachers agreed to an interview. However, only nine of those participants completed an interview. One potential participant did not qualify due to her content area. Two potential participants scheduled interviews but did not appear for their scheduled time. These were rescheduled, but the participants did not appear for the rescheduled interview. The remaining potential participants did not respond to my request to schedule an interview, despite several attempts. Although I originally planned for 10 participants, my final number of nine participants provided both thematic and code saturation (see Hennink et al., 2017; Namey et al., 2016). Namey et al. (2016) noted that 80-90% of thematic saturation could be obtained in nine to 16 interviews. By the ninth in-depth interview in the current study, no new themes were revealed by the participants.

Data Collection Instrument

Each participant was scheduled for one 90-minute video interview in my Zoom meeting room. The interviews were recorded through the Zoom application, which provided both a video recording and an audio-only recording. Interview duration ranged from 27 minutes to 84 minutes. This variation was due to the diversity of participant experiences using social media tools in their instructional practice.

Variations in Data Collection Plan

In addition to the slight variation in the number of participants noted previously, there also were changes to the participants' location due to the lack of response by potential participants. My original plan was to focus on one specific region of the United States. I sent invitations and the informed consent form through 39 closed Facebook groups that were specific to ELA teachers, secondary school teachers, and teachers in the states I was targeting. I also sent invitations through my Twitter and LinkedIn accounts, including 17 closed LinkedIn groups dedicated to educators. These invitations were sent in late December 2018 and again in early January 2019. I received no responses from teachers in the states I had identified. However, I received nine responses to my demographic survey from teachers outside of the region planned for my research. In addition, I had several teachers contact me through Facebook to ask if they could participate in the study. These teachers were not located in the states that were identified in my original invitation and original informed consent form.

By the end of January 2019, I did not have any participants for the study. I met with my dissertation chair and e-mailed my methodologist for solutions and was granted

permission to apply to IRB for a change of procedure to remove the geographic barrier. I was granted approval on January 30, 2019.

Unusual Circumstances

During one interview, the participant was using her phone to run the Zoom application and her phone died about 50 minutes into the interview. She was able to contact me within a half hour to let me know what happened and convey her willingness to reschedule. We continued the interview the next day without interruption.

Another unusual circumstance was that I had two potential participants schedule interviews with me but not show for their scheduled time. I was able to contact each of them to reschedule. However, they missed their second scheduled interview time as well. I attempted to contact each of them again to reschedule, but neither of these potential participants responded.

Data Analysis

After each interview recording was transcribed and checked and verified for accuracy, I conducted precoding using a priori codes from my conceptual frameworks, previous research, and the preliminary words and phrases that I saw repeated as I was conducting my research. Within the concept of connectivism, I identified codes such as *peer sharing*, *utilizing external databases*, *student-centered instruction*, and *networks of expertise*. Within the concept of convergence culture, I identified codes such as *collective intelligence*, *engagement*, and *participation*. I also precoded using the preliminary words and ideas that were repeated while I was conducting the interviews. These codes included *access*, *appropriate communication*, *code switching*, *digital literacy*, *digital footprint*,

global society, *meaningful instruction*, *planning*, and *relevance.* Table 3 shows the initial list of codes with explanations.

Table 3

List of Initial Codes with Explanations

Conceptual Lens/Preliminary Ideas	Code	Explanation
Connectivism	Networks of Expertise	Statements that gave examples of students using social media to connect with networks that would provide information about the topic being studied.
	Peer Sharing	Statements that gave examples of students using social media to collaborate.
	Student-Centered Instruction	Statements that gave examples of using social media for student-centered instructional practices.
	Utilizing External Databases	Statements that gave examples of students using social media as a learning resource.
Convergence Culture	Collective Intelligence	Observations of students developing a combined knowledge within their virtual community.
	Engagement	Teacher's observations of students' interest in the instruction when social media is used.
	Participation	Teacher's observations of students' participation when social media is used.
Preliminary Ideas from Repeated Phrases	Access	Challenges with limits to available technologies to support social media as an instructional tool.
	Appropriate Communication	Statements of experiences with students providing feedback and other types of online communication through social media.
	Code Switching	Challenges when students have difficulty making the switch from social media for entertainment to social media for instruction.
	Digital Footprint	Statements related to concerns about how students present themselves through social media.
	Digital Literacy	Statements related to providing instruction to students on how to evaluate information found through social media.
	Global Society	Statements related to providing students with experiences outside of their immediate physical access.
	Meaningful Instruction	Teachers' desire to insure their instructional practices with social media are connected to their instructional goals and objectives.
	Relevance	Statements of the connection between social media as an instructional tool and the students' high use of social media in their non-academic lives.

I used precoding to consider how these concepts may help to frame the answers to my research questions. Saldana (2016) noted that precodes could become the evidence to support later analysis. However, although precoding drew my attention to a broader perspective of my queries, I did not think that it gave me the information I needed to provide a thorough analysis and detailed understanding to answer each of my research questions. Therefore, I used in vivo coding as a secondary method to gain a better understanding of the participants' experiences through their own words.

Because the interviews were in-depth discussions of the participants' experiences and the responses provided could rarely be lumped into one code, I employed a splitting method for identifying phrases within each passage that addressed the research questions, rather than attempting to select one phrase to represent a data section (i.e. response) as a whole (see Saldana, 2016). Once I had completed the in vivo coding, I reviewed the transcripts again to identify patterns in the responses as they related to my precodes, the conceptual lenses, and the topic of each research question (experiences, successes, and challenges), which led to the development of new codes as well as minor adjustments to the precodes. These patterns became the themes that I identified for each research question. As recommended by Saldana (2016), any code that was common among three fourths of the participants was indicated as a theme. In this study, three fourths equated to six or more participants. Saldana (2016) also noted that any code shared by one fourth of the participants should be noted as potentially relevant to the study. However, with only nine participants, one fourth equated to two participants, which I did not think was adequate to merit value. Instead, I noted codes that were shared by four or five

participants as potentially relevant. Table 4 shows the final themes with their connections to the conceptual lenses, research questions, and codes and participant quotes that led to those themes.

Table 4

Themes, Codes, and Quotes Related to Conceptual Lenses and Research Questions

Theme (commonality)	Conceptual lens	Research question	Relevant codes/quote
Code switching (7)		3	*Usage code switching*, *language code switching;* "We forget that even though our kids use technology all the time, they don't use it as an educational tool" (Ms. Evans); "How do I behave in a formal educational way versus the way I would talk to someone on Instagram" (Ms. Havers).
Building relationships (7)			"And social media has helped me relate to them . . . being able to speak their language" (Ms. Boone).
Exposure to global perspectives (6)	Convergence culture; connectivism	1	*New experiences*; "I have students who have never been out of the state. . .and they interact with kids from other countries now. So, it's really expanded their frame of reference" (Ms. Boone).
Increased engagement (8)	Convergence culture	2	"I did notice a dramatic shift as soon as I started including more social media outlets and more electronic and technology-based learning. The students, they're just, they're more engaged" (Ms. Adams); "If you compare using social media and how much they're going to engage in the topic, it's always going to be more using social media than using pencil and paper in the classroom" (Ms. Fellows).
Increased participation (8)	Convergence culture; connectivism	2	"They participate a little bit more. They discuss a little bit more and they process the information a little bit easier" (Ms. Adam)

(*table continues)*

Theme (commonality)	Conceptual lens	Research question	Relevant codes/quote
Meaningful instructional application (9)		1	*Learning curve, relevance;* "I would say I'm more mindful because I want to make sure that my social media usage still fits within what I want to teach" (Ms. George).
Real-world application (8)		1	"I think it's important for students to know not only how you can use social media in a positive way, but how is the tool that you can use to find out what you need to find out or to make contact or, you know, to get to know more about things and the things that they want to know more about because that's how in their future they're going to use it" (Ms. Evans).
Student-centered instruction (6)	Connectivism	1	*Differentiation;* "I tried to incorporate more active learning, more of me facilitating and them doing rather than me doing" (Ms. Havers).
Student learning (7)		2	*Critical thinking,* "I'm actually having the kids create more and, you know, apply what we've done a little bit more rather than just deliver that content. So that's allowed me to really push more student learning, student- centered learning" (Ms. Evans).
Teaching valuable participation (9)	Convergence culture	1	*Student desire to participate, peer sharing/feedback, appropriateness;* "So I've been teaching a lot with seventh grade on how we can positively comment with each other, how we can give each other feedback that's not intentionally hurtful" (Ms. Charles)

The first research question addressed the participants' experiences when using social media, their decision to use social media, and how using social media as an educational tool impacted their instructional practices. Within these discussions, the following themes emerged: *exposure to global perspectives, meaningful instructional application, real-world application*, and *teaching valuable participation*.

The second research question focused on the participants' successes when using social media with students as an instructional tool. The participants reflected on their observations of the benefits to and best practices when using social media as a tool for learning. The participants identified the successes they experienced which aligned with the following categories: *increased engagement*, *increased participation*, *relationship building*, and *student learning*.

The third research question pertained to the challenges the participants faced when using social media with students as an instructional tool. When discussing the challenges faced, the participants talked about specific challenges they had, challenges the students had, and solutions to these challenges. The participants also shared their own concerns regarding social media used within the field of education. One of the most prominent themes that emerged in relation to challenges was *code switching*. Within the theme of code switching there were two aspects: *usage* and *language.* Although neither of these aspects alone qualified as a theme, they each had enough participants mention it to warrant consideration. Figure 1 shows how these sub-themes differ and provides examples of quotes relating to these codes from the interviews.

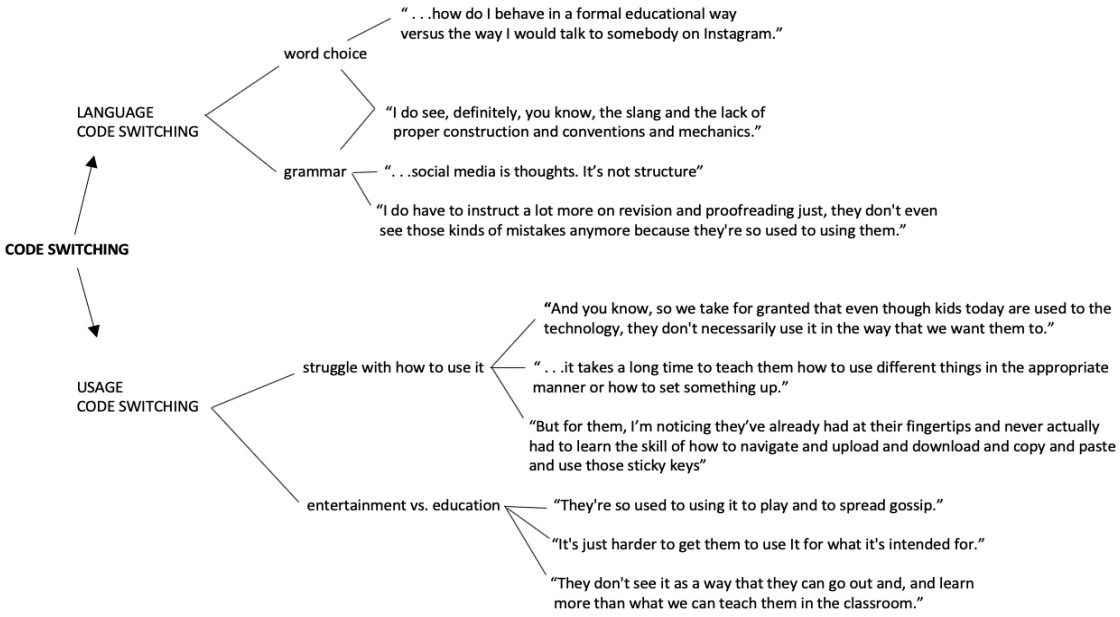

Figure 1. Types of code switching with exemplifying quotes

After identifying each theme in relation to each research question, I noted considerable overlap across the research questions. Themes that explored the teachers' experiences (Research Question 1) could also fit within the experienced successes (Research Question 2) or the challenges faced (Research Question 3). Therefore, I reviewed the codes and transcripts again to identify relationships among the themes that identified commonalities and hierarchies with regard to successes and challenges. Figure 2 illustrates these relationships.

Figure 2. Relationships and hierarchies among themes and codes as they pertain to successes and challenges.

There were no outright discrepancies in the data. There were instances of participants noting experiences that were specific to their location or school demographic. For example, teachers in impoverished urban and rural areas had some experiences due to limited access to technology that were contrary to the experiences of the teachers in affluent areas or private schools. These differences suggest the need for further study and are addressed in Chapter 5.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The credibility of my study began with the preparation for my research. The development of my literature review provided the knowledge base against which I evaluated my own work. Throughout the process, I had regular debriefings with my dissertation committee. My data collection tool was reviewed and critiqued by an expert panel to verify the interview questions would provide the necessary data rich information to answer my research questions. Before and after each interview I used a reflexive journal to identify any biases I may hold. Finally, I incorporated member-checking into my interview process. Approximately one week after each interview, I provided the participant with the written transcript from the interview and allowed the participant to check the transcript for accuracy.

Transferability

I first addressed transferability through the comprehensive description of the study's boundaries, scope, and delimitations. Moreover, within the results, I have presented a thorough portrayal of the participants' experiences to allow the readers to interpret the transferability of the data (see Shenton, 2004). The participant selection process allowed for diversity in secondary grade level taught, gender, age, and years of experience. These factors were not qualifiers for my study thereby creating a random selection of these demographics. However, there may be limitations to transferability among the teachers' specific experiences as they pertain to the demographics of the schools within which they teach. For example, the experience of the three private school

teachers may not be reflective of all private school teachers. Likewise, the experiences of the one teacher in an urban district may not be transferable to the experiences of all urban school teachers.

Dependability

Social media as an instructional tool is a relatively new educational phenomenon. Therefore, I have provided a thorough explanation of my methodology and design so that my study may be easily reproduced. In addition, each participant was given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy. My coding process incorporated themes from my conceptual frameworks and themes from previous research. Finally, I maintained a comprehensive audit trail, including records of my participant invitations and contact, notes before, during, and after each interview, as well as notes during my analysis of the data collected.

Confirmability

As noted, during my study, I used a solid audit trail and a reflexive journaling process. Before each interview, I prepared by writing my thoughts, any concerns, and reflections of the previous interviews. After each interview, I reflected on the interview within my journal, providing transparency to any potential biases or threats to the objectivity of my research. I also had a detailed audit trail of my analysis processes, including notes on my thought process as I moved inductively from codes to themes.

Results

The findings of this study do not neatly align solely with one research question over another. There is some overlap within the themes that emerged in the findings of

each question. Therefore, the results are organized by the themes revealed through the analysis of the interview transcripts. Within each theme, I present a discussion of the participants' experiences in general. In addition, I explain the participants' observations of successes or challenges that were revealed throughout the interviews. Themes were determined by a commonality of six or more participants. Commonalities experiences by four or five participants are also noted as warranting consideration but will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Meaningful Instructional Application

The first research question asked: What are the lived experiences of secondary school ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool? For the sake of this study, I defined social media as any Internet-based platform that is participatory and interactive in that it allows user-generated content to be shared with other users of the same application (Alabdulkareem, 2015; Bartow, 2014). Although I shared this definition with the teachers, I did not specify that the teachers must use social media as a social media network with students in order to participate in this study. For example, as defined above, YouTube is a social media network. Some of the teachers created assignments in which the students were required to produce a YouTube video and post it to YouTube. Other teachers used YouTube as a support to their direct instruction, showing the students videos that aligned with their current topic of study. Each of these uses were acceptable as social media use in the classroom.

Social media networks and usage. The discussions of social media usage reveal a range of both the types of social media networks and how they were used. The

variations of social media networks fell on a spectrum of highly controlled and limited in scope to completely open (see Figure 3). Highly controlled and limited social media networks gave the teacher complete control over the population sharing information such as one class period or several class periods of one teacher. These types of social media networks included Google Classroom and Padlet. On the other end of the spectrum were social media applications that were completely open and provided the teacher with limited control over the populations that would have access to the shared information such as Twitter and Instagram.

Figure 3. Social media networks used for instruction on a spectrum of most limited to most open.

The teachers' usage of social media with students fell on a similar spectrum of highly controlled to completely open (see Figure 4). On one end of the spectrum was using a social media network as a template without actually posting to that network. For example, a teacher creates an assignment wherein the students write a summary of a passage using 140 characters like a tweet, but don't actually post these summaries to Twitter. Then there are the situations where teachers show the students posts or videos from social media applications but do not have the student interact on these applications. On the fully open side of the spectrum, teachers created assignments wherein the students

posted directly to the social media applications. Figure 4 shows the spectrum of usage with examples from the participants.

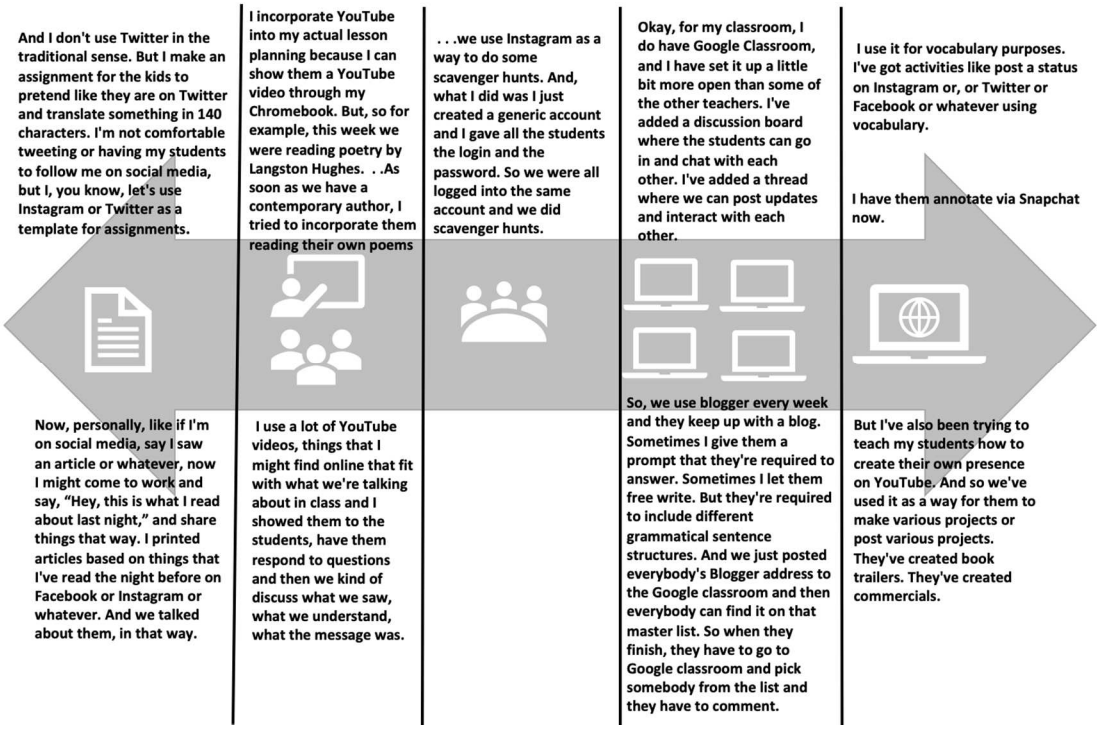

Figure 4. Social media usage on a spectrum of most limited to most open with examples.

Relevance. All nine teachers spoke about the importance of connecting social media use in the classroom to the instructional goals in ways that were both appropriate and meaningful. All of the participants expressed the need to be cognizant of the academic purpose in using social media with students, particularly in making sure it supported their instructional goals for their students. Social media became a way for teachers to help support student success with a learning objective in a way that the teachers saw as relevant to the students' lives. The teachers also observed ways in which social media helped them to make the actual content relevant to their students' lives. Ms. George explained how she used Instagram to teach characterization in Macbeth:

> This year I've been really gearing towards making assignments, like actually having my students access Instagram and Snapchat to make it more relevant for them. Using it more as a tool to make literature more relevant or to use what they're already using every day and to make it more fun and exciting. For example, at least this past year, I've had them use it for character development analysis. I've had them make Instagram. And I use them and explain, you know, with Instagram we portray ourselves certain way. We have hashtags that are short and sweet, but it means so much more . . . And so, for Macbeth, which I'm teaching right now, I'm having them create Instagram accounts for their character. And I'm like, think about how you use it today and apply it to Macbeth. You know, how many followers would he have, who would he follow? 'Cause when you think about the types of people that we follow on Instagram, they tell you a lot about that person.

Ms. Denton also provided ways in which she uses social media to make the content relevant to the students' lives:

> I would say every lesson when I think about designing a lesson -- I have tons of memes, students love memes. So, if I'm doing, for example, irony: tons of ironic memes from online. And puns, they love puns. Parody, they love parodies. So sometimes it's just, like, a Google slide show of tons of 20 parodies I found. Or sometimes it's something on YouTube . . .When we're doing irony and we're doing puns, these are the funny things that are coming up in their feeds. These are

> things that they're seeing on their account, these are our funny little references to things that happen every day.

In this way, teachers were able to connect with the students and use social media to both 'hook' the students into the content and use it a tool to guide the students into applying concepts that may be otherwise more challenging for them. Ms. Inman explained it this way:

> At some point, you've gotta have some kind of common ground, you've got to make common ground. And that tends to be some type of common ground. You know, I might not be into every genre they're into or reading or watching whatever they're watching, but if I can connect on some level where we can look at the same thing that seems to help.

Similarly, Ms. Boone made this connection:

> Social Media is a familiar platform for them. They're used to being, they're used to doing Tik Tok videos. They're used to being on Instagram. So, this is kind of a way to bridge something that they're familiar with, with unfamiliar content and so it helps build their competence that they already know how to do this. And I think once you have that competence built up, they're more willing to learn.

The participants also identified social media as a means to combat academic apathy. Ms. Evans saw how using social media broke down the barrier of students' opposition to reading and writing:

> I teach English language arts and most of my students are below grade level readers and writers and they love to proclaim that they hate reading and writing.

> It's a way to trick them into doing both of those things without really even knowing that's what they're doing. So, it's a way to get them to practice those skills that we would be working on, you know, writing a paragraph. Okay, well instead of writing a paragraph today, you're going to write up a blog post, you're going to write an email, you're going to write a tweet. And the kids are all excited about it because it's not writing a paragraph. We're writing an essay and, and they're doing the same thing and they don't even realize it.

Challenges. Although relevancy appeared to be something that the teachers either strived for or recognized as a reason to use social media as an instructional tool, it was not experienced as an easy task to incorporate meaningfully into their practice. The struggle to apply social media applications in ways that supported instructional goals, student learning, and student engagement was a notable challenge. The teachers clearly understood that these tools could be seen as more fun than fundamental. Ms. Fellows commented that "the challenge is trying to find something relevant to their lesson". Ms. George agreed stating, "I would say I'm more mindful because I want to make sure that my social media usage still fits within what I want to teach." But she also cautioned, "I think that it's very easy with social media to have too much fun with it and make it exciting and fun for them. But I also don't want to take away, well what is my goal with this unit?" Ms. Boone was also concerned that her peers may not be focused on academic rigor when incorporating social media into classroom instruction:

> My concerns are always that teachers are using it as a substitution rather than to redefine learning. They're substituting, you know, a worksheet for a digital

> worksheet. They're not using. . .they're using it for the dog and pony show for the administration to come in. They're not using it purposefully. They're using it as "I want to break up instruction and wanting to introduce something fun in the classroom" and it's not an integrated part of their curriculum and instruction. . . They're unaware of how to do it in a way that's going to transform learning and it's become a gimmick for them.

Although it's a valid concern, using social media for its entertainment value was not reflected in the experiences with the participants. All of the participants shared a desire to used social media in ways that would be of significant educational value. Nonetheless, there was an understanding that others may not view social media in the same light. Ms. Evans explained this common thread:

> I think it's just, we're kind of all stuck in this, how are we going to use these tools that the kids are using already in a way that our powers that be, like our higher ups find acceptable, and not crossing the line. And I think a lot of us are tip toeing on this imaginary line of I don't want to get in trouble because I'm trying to engage my students and I, and I don't know how to use these tools in a safe way that my administrators will understand.

The concern of getting into trouble was directly stated by five of the nine participants. This concern did not stop the participants from using social media, but they did note a hesitation and a tendency to proceed with caution. In most cases, the participants felt that as long as they could justify using the social media network with a strong connection to the instructional objectives, they were confident in their choice.

Even as the participants provided detailed examples of using social media in ways that were academically purposeful and relevant to the students' lives, using these applications in this way did not come naturally. Of the nine participants, seven expressed experiences that reflected a learning curve when using social media for educational purposes. The teachers felt like they were learning how to use social media applications in an educational manner right along with their students. Ms. Adams likely explained it best when she said, "It's a lot of trial and error. You've got to see what works for you and you've got to see what works for your personal, your personality type."

Student-centered instruction. Similar to the previous studies noted in the literature review, student-centered instruction was a common thread throughout this study. For eight of the nine participants meaningful instructional application was expressed through using social media to provide students with autonomy within their learning and assignments. There was a sense that the teachers could place themselves more in the role of facilitators than being the sole source of information in the classroom. Ms. George explained how her students use Snapchat to annotate the texts that they are reading. These annotations or 'Snaps' become guide to the direction of her classroom discussions:

> . . . [A]s they're reading, they're submitting their Snaps to me via OneNote, like a collaborative folder, and I actually pull from their Snaps to drive discussion. Of course, I also supplement . . . because they might not have hit every talking point. But for the most part, when I tell them, "You're tracking satire," and then . . . I'll

> pull their snaps up and I'll go "Look, you know, Alexia said this, and I really liked that. Let's talk about like why she snapped that or what she's saying.

Ms. George went on to say that using social media in this way helped to her to plan her lessons around specific talking points. If the students noted a key idea, she could use that as a jumping off point for her discussion. If the students missed an important symbol, the lack of "Snaps" gave her the indication that she needed to address that as well.

In addition, several teachers stated that through social media the onus of responsibility for the learning and engagement within their classrooms is placed directly on the student. This led to an increase in student accountability. Ms. Havers described the phenomenon:

> It, number one, holds the kids accountable because the chance of me calling on them when they're one of 28 kids is much smaller than the chance of them being heard or listened to when they're commenting on a group as a group of five on a blog. So, there's a much higher chance of them being held accountable for their thoughts and their comments. And so, I think that causes them to be a little bit more cautious and a little bit more thoughtful about what they're saying because they know their peers are going to see what they're saying and going to react. Whereas if they're all raising their hand, only one of them is to get chosen and the other 27 are going to be safe.

In this way, the use of social media appeared to virtually reduce the classroom size. Class size is often highlighted by teachers and teachers' unions as a significant factor

contributing to student success. The participants revealed how social media created the illusion of smaller class sizes with all the academic benefits of actual smaller classes.

Within the benefits of student-centered instruction when using social media was the sense that social media applications also helped the teachers to more easily differentiate the learning. Ms. Charles noted that her students were at different reading comprehension levels and social media applications like YouTube helped to eliminate the barrier of comprehension for students who struggled, creating an opportunity for those students to understand and engage in the discussions. Ms. Evans also expressed the benefits of social media when differentiating for students across various academic abilities: " . . .it has helped me differentiate a little bit more. I can reach them at their different levels more. I can see where they're at and I can individually figure out where to take them because of that." Similarly, Ms. Boone used social media to differentiate for her special education students.

Increased engagement. Another significant success revealed by eight of the nine participants was an increase in student engagement. Although there was an acknowledgement by the teachers that other factors such as the topic of study, the students themselves, and the dynamic of the class impacted student engagement, the overall consensus was that social media had a positive influence on engagement. This engagement did have a range of impact. In some cases, the teachers noticed that students were more willing to participate, even if that participation wasn't much beyond what Ms. Evans described as "scrolling through and clicking". Ms. Fellows agreed with her generalization: "I have found that using social media, using computers and technology,

there are always going to be more participants that want to do something."

Ms. George saw a deeper level of engagement beyond the increased participation. When asked about the benefits she saw since using social media with her classes, she explained:

> Just a different level of engagement in the text. Particularly with the Instagram assignments that I have assigned for Gatsby and for Macbeth. I did juniors with Gatsy and sophomores, Macbeth. And . . . they had some really, really clever usernames and just, they really thought about it in a different way. They thought about the motivation and even little hashtags, and they ended up following each other and interacting like, "Oh, you're Daisy? I'm Gatsby. Let's follow each other." And I love that. And they started commenting on each other's posts and it was different. And I loved the thought we put into it. That was the main thing is that engagement that wasn't really there before.

Ms. Adams noted a more holistic impact to the heightened engagement she experienced with her students:

> I did notice a dramatic shift as soon as I started including more social media outlets and more electronic and technology-based learning. The students, they're just, they're more engaged. I don't have to redirect behavior as often. I also don't have as many issues with defiance or challenging rules since they have to use the technology anyway.

Student learning. Another significant success revealed by seven of the nine participants with regard to meaningful instructional application of social media was the

positive impact on student learning. This aspect is seen repeated through several of the major themes. The benefits to student learning when using social media are not limited to just the instructional benefits, nor do the instructional benefits exist independent of the other benefits. In reflecting on the student learning when using social media, the participants identified experiences with improved critical thinking, providing students with diverse opportunities to show proficiency, and a positive impact to academic achievement. Ms. Boone, Ms. Evans, and Ms. Inman all experienced social media as a tool that enabled them to create instructional goals that went beyond content delivery and rote memorization to application of the content. Ms. Evans explained:

> It's allowed my instructional goals to be a higher level of Bloom's because I'm actually having the kids create more and, you know, apply what we've done a little bit more rather than just deliver that content. So that's allowed me to really push more student learning, student-centered learning. And that's been great.

The teachers also expressed the ways in which incorporating social media gave the students various opportunities to show proficiency. Although relevant to all students, Ms. Boone shared her experiences specifically with how social media benefits students with learning disabilities:

> I want to show them that there's no right or wrong way to get to an answer and given social media and having all of these tools available helps them to see that there are many ways to get to the answer and maybe ways to share their learning and to demonstrate what they have learned.

Finally, similar to what was seen in previous research noted in the literature review, the participants observed student academic achievement which they attributed to the integrating social media networks into their instruction. Although Ms. Havers described her experiences with student achievement, she did note that the academic achievement was more of an indirect result of using social media. She explained:

> So, I think it definitely increases the depth of understanding as, as a whole group. And, and we've seen our scores on standardized tests and other kinds of performance measures go up because of this kind of collaborative instruction that we're talking about.

She further reflected on the changes to the state tests that the students are required to take and how initially they were not prepared for these changes, which resulted in lower test scores. Over the past three years, however, they experienced a 30 point increase in proficiency scores that she correlated, at least in part, to the use of social media with students:

> So, in that short amount of time, we've made a lot of gains in ELA. And it's hard to say we attribute it all to the social media. But we definitely attribute a lot of it to the collaboration and the critical thinking that we've taught via collaboration and via social media.

The theme of meaningful instructional application of social media provide a dense exploration of teachers' experiences. From relevant application and challenges within to the success seen in student learning, the participants saw the use of social media as a way to reach students academically and personally.

Teaching Valuable Participation

Teaching the students to participate in a way that brings value to the learning process was another major theme the study revealed. The teachers recognized that peer sharing and peer feedback were essential tools for student learning. At the same time, they identified the lack of student mindfulness regarding appropriate communication and appropriate usage when using social media in the classroom. In some cases, this appeared as a lack of student awareness to recognize that using social media in an educational or professional setting required a different communication style than when using social media for personal use. In other cases, the students seemed to struggle with regarding social media as a tool for learning. In order for the students to be able to see the benefits of peer collaboration through social media they required instruction on how to be productive participants using this medium.

All of participants identified benefits to using social media for peer feedback, sharing, and participation. However, the teachers recognized that these benefits were dependent upon the students engaging purposefully with each other within the framework of the learning objectives. An examination of the teachers' thoughts about the value of peer feedback is necessary to understand why the participants felt teaching the students how to participate in a meaningful and appropriate way was so important.

The participants noted that social media applications allowed for ease in timely feedback, particularly when the students were tasked with commenting on each others' work. Above all else, the teachers noticed that when the students provided each other

with feedback, not only did the student getting the feedback improve their writing, but so did the student giving the feedback. Ms. Havers explained:

> And what I've found is that kids not only were getting better because they were getting timely, actionable feedback, but they were getting better because they were helping other people and they were seeing what other people were doing and they were like, "Oh wait, I think I should do it that way too." Or "I think, you know, you should do it more like me".

Ms. Fellows also saw how using these applications allowed her to bolster her students and model this encouragement in order for the students to learn to support each other:

> …they can show me what they can do, because I can see those kids and I know those kids and I know what they're capable of. So, I want them to show me what they can do. That way they can show each other and hopefully encourage each other. "Look, this is what I was able to do and now you can do it too."

Similarly, Ms. Charles reflected on how she addressed peer feedback with her students:

> And I said, the best thing you can do for your classmate is to really dig into the assignment and just make a ton of comments. Even if it's "this doesn't make sense" or "I don't get where you're going with this," because the more feedback, as long as it's positively phrased, the more feedback you can give your classmates, the better their assignment's going to eventually be. And it was really helpful because they had that moment to say, "this doesn't make sense" or "your word choice doesn't work here" or "capitalize this word" or "spell check please."

> Because it wasn't coming from me. It was coming from their classmates; so that they can say what can we do?

The participants also noted that students were not immediately open to providing this kind of feedback. The students' initial feedback appeared to be just to post comments that were to provide proof of attendance or give another student a "high five," as noted by Ms. Charles. Ms. Evans also noted that although her sophomores, juniors, and seniors were more likely to give meaningful feedback, her freshman did not yet have that skill:

> I will say that with my current group of freshmen, if they are commenting on each other's items, it is not thoughtful or, relating to anything. So, they will comment on things, but it's just like, "Yo, like, like my picture."

Like Ms. Evans, six of the participants identified two specific aspects of feedback that they had to address and teach to the students: appropriate usage and appropriate feedback (see Figure 5). Figure 5 displays the concerns noted by the individual participants. These comments reflected the relevant factors indicating further instruction in using social media educationally and in appropriate communication before students are ready to participate in a manner that contributes to their learning.

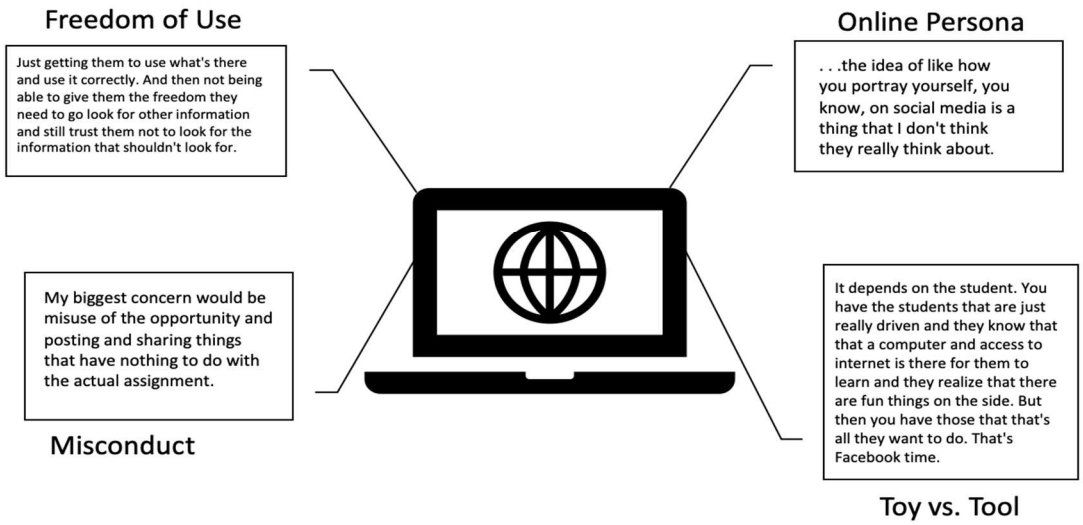

Figure 5. Teachers' concerns regarding students' understanding of social media use for education.

Code switching. In classroom settings, code switching is often used to describe the student's ability to switch between academic language and highly casual language such as the language they use with friends (Knestrict & Schoensteadt, 2007). In this study, code switching was a term used by several participants to describe the students' ability (or inability) to distinguish using social media for entertainment purposes and for educational purposes. This challenge presented itself in two ways: through usage and through communication. Figure 6 provides examples of the concerns the teachers had with regard to students making the switch from using social media in a casual sense to using it as an educational tool.

In addition to code switching with usage, the participants also noted their students struggling with code switching with their communication across social media platforms used for academic purposes. There was a repeated challenge of students seemingly not

knowing the difference between appropriate and inappropriate communication using social media. Ms. Charles expressed the challenge this way:

> I think that they need to learn how to interact because they want to respond. I guess they are, in a lot of ways—and I don't feel like I was taught this and it could be because of where I grew up or my age or anything—but I don't feel like I have to respond to everything or the first thing that comes out. They feel like they have the ability or the opportunity or the interest or the right, I guess is another word for it, to respond to everything. And to teach them not only that; they don't have to respond to everything. And to also to respond in the most polite way possible gives them, gives what they say more value.

Ms. Charles' point was reflected by many of the participants. With regard to students feeling as if they have the right to respond to everything, Ms. George concurred and noted the consequence: "the mob mentality is much faster with social media. . . they are quick to get everyone riled up."

The teachers' experiences suggest that the idea that there is an appropriate way to communicate through social media applications was not innately understood by the students. Ms. George reflected on her conversations with students:

> . . .what you do in the classroom is applicable to what you could do outside. . . if you're doing an online discussion, yeah, it's important to learn how to be respectful and disagree respectfully. Like, especially when it comes to, like, the

> bigger issues outside in the world. . . learning how to navigate that when you're on social media, and how to be professional, and not be horrible and rude and nasty.

Although code switching was a notable challenge to overcome, it did not deter all of the teachers from using social media to encourage or support student to student feedback or peer sharing. Some teachers did limit comments through the social media applications, either turning off the commenting function or requiring approval before a comment could be posted. Nonetheless, a notable thread within this and other challenges revealed in the study is that not only did these challenges not deter the teachers from using social media applications, but the teachers viewed the challenges as an opportunity to teach students how to appropriately use and interact on social media.

Increased participation. The theme of teaching valuable participation revealed significant successes experienced by the participants, particularly with regard to students who were usually not as willing to participate or, as Ms. Evans identified: the "reluctant learners." Eight of the nine participants noted an increase in participation when using social media applications. This increase in participation appeared to have two causes. First, the teachers noted that when using social media, the students did not seem to feel like they were engaging in a learning activity. In these scenarios, the students viewed a learning activity as something that was not enjoyable. Therefore, when social media applications were incorporated the students were not as reluctant to engage and participate. Ms. Evans explained: ". . .my most reluctant learner is more willing to be on task, at least when we're using these tools because they're like, 'Oh, this isn't, you know,

this isn't learning,' in their opinion."

Another cause of the increased participation seemed to be the comfort level or pseudo-anonymity that the social media application provided to students who may have previously not felt confident enough to share in the classroom. Ms. Denton explained this student fear:

> So, their level of comfort speaking out in class often has to do with their confidence in themselves. And often that my struggling students, my students in special ed, my students with IEPs, they're not not participating because of me. They're not participating because they struggle and they're embarrassed and they worry about what their peers are going to say when they get something wrong.

Ms. Charles took this a step further. She saw how because students were more willing to participate, they were given a voice they did not have before:

> . . .there's research out there that they can find that's not just from what they understand in the classroom. So, a larger world. That everyone has comments and perspectives, and it's not just the kids who are yelling out in the middle of class. It's the quiet student who really understands the topic way better than anybody else, but just doesn't have enough courage to speak out when he's right in everybody else is wrong. . . And sometimes I feel like that's the one positive of social media is that every voice can be heard. . . there's comments and perspectives and ideas that are different than their own that they can see on social media.

For Ms. Boone the idea of giving students a voice had particular relevance for her special education students:

> I think that especially for special education students and helping them see that they do have a voice. They do have something important to say and they can get to that same level of thinking skills as their peers do . . .

Reflecting back on these first two themes of meaningful instructional application and teaching valuable participation revealed a relationship among the sub-themes: student-centered learning, increased engagement, student learning, and increased participation (see Figure 6). These subthemes are not mutually exclusive. Social media applications allow for teachers to create lessons that are student centered, giving the students the ownership and autonomy over their learning. This, in turn, resulted in increased engagement and increased participation, leading to heightened student learning. The academic achievement was not experienced as a result of social media usage in and of itself. Rather, the social media applications served as a catalyst for more student-centered lessons, more opportunities for participation, and more student engagement.

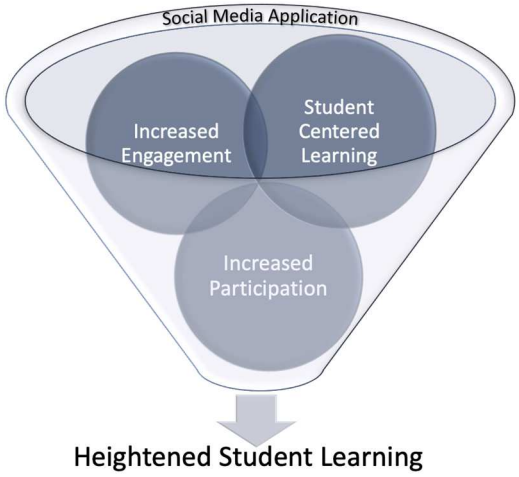

Figure 6. Relationship among engagement, participation, and student-centered learning leading to heightened student learning.

Real-World Application

Among eight of the nine participants was a notable desire to ensure their students were prepared for college and career in our technologically driven society. They viewed the educational use of social media as a first step to proficiency in using technology for professional applications. Ms. George spoke to the collaborative aspects that the students would need in order to achieve success later in life:

> And I told them you need to figure out a way to collaborate because that's a skill you need. . . And so, my goal with using technology is not necessarily to just also make it relevant, but for them to learn how to navigate it so that for later on in their lives, you know, they can collaborate with your coworkers and colleagues because Google is a thing. Like a lot of people use it in terms of that.

Ms. Boone addressed the issue of life skills, such as time management:

> So, we have to show the kids how to manage their time and this is one of those soft skills that we have to teach about time management. Where before it was TV,

> spending more time watching TV and video games. Now, we have to help teach them how to use social media and the Internet responsibly and to manage their time. . . So, it's a soft skill that we're teaching that I think is really important

Ms. Evans also had a focus on life skills. However, her concern was a little different because of her student population. She was more concerned with her students' digital literacy as they were more likely to enter directly into the workforce, rather than higher education:

> Well, for sure, because number one, I think the large majority of my student population is not going to go to college after they leave high school. . .most of our students go on to seek technical opportunities and, you know, variety of things. So, I feel like it's important for students to be knowledgeable and educated digital consumers. There's so many adults that we interact with on a daily basis who are not educated to digital consumers. You know, they see an article shared on Facebook and they believe it 100%, you know, and, I think it's important for students to know not only how you can use social media in a positive way, but how is the tool that you can use to find out what you need to find out or to make contact or, you know, to get to know more about things and the things that they want to know more about because that's how in their future they're going to use it.

The other main concern of the participants was in helping the students understand the concept of a digital footprint. Ms. Havers felt it was important that the students

recognize the permanence of anything that they post online. Ms. George likewise spoke to her students about how they present themselves on social media:

> . . . the idea of like how you portray yourself, you know, on social media is a thing that I don't think they really think about. 'Cause sometimes they post whatever they want. And that is something they need to be mindful of. And so, I always try to talk purposefully about how this affects the real world, you know, how you present yourself. You know, while, yes, you shouldn't "care" what people think about you, but posting whatever you want, social media has consequences.

Ms. Charles agreed with Ms. George, but had stronger concerns:

> We have to teach our students the right way to use it or we are going to get lost in this. And that's not necessarily where we want them. We want them, we want our students to be well versed and understand and to know when to put themselves out there and when not to.

Although the teachers seemed to vacillate between seeing the importance of preparing students for living and working in a digital age and protecting the students from the potential downfalls or threats when engaging in the tools of that digital age, their concerns were never a deterrent from using social media educationally with students. The teachers seemed to feel that the benefits outweighed their concerns. Moreover, the teachers used these concerns as the impetus to teach the students aspects of digital literacy that went beyond their English language arts content area.

Exposure to Global Perspectives

Another common theme among the participants was using social media to provide new perspectives to the students that they may not receive otherwise. For teachers in urban or rural settings, particularly those that were poverty-stricken areas, the new perspectives were noted in terms of physical locations. These teachers used social media applications to literally show the students places that they would likely not have the opportunity to see or visit. Often, these locations tied into the current novel or literary unit. Ms. Fellows shared her experience:

> Well, especially for kids like these that are that low-income urban area that don't travel anywhere. I think using that social media to . . . research other areas and see other places. 'Cause I've got kids, when we did Call of the Wild the first part of the year, when you show them where Alaska is, a lot of them think that it's really south of North America because that's where the little box puts it on the map and they don't realize that you have to cross a whole other country to get up there. And then you show them pictures in the northern lights. "Well that's just, that's just editing Ms. [Fellows]. That's not real." "No, that is real." It's just exposing them, the whole social media, so that they can see that is different other places.

Ms. Charles compared her own experiences when she was a student to what she can now offer her own students:

> I love that opportunity that they have to have a more global perspective. And I think the only thing I remember as a kid, as a student myself, looking globally or nationally was when we sent, received these postcards from my teacher's parents

> who were doing a cross country road trip. And that was the only time I remember seeing the world, until my parents took me on their own travels. But I could do, I did a lesson on Italy and the Roman Empire and I was able to pull up video and blogs and perspectives of the Roman Empire from Italy that was translated. And being able to do that and still be in my own little classroom was a huge perspective change. . . It was much bigger than just them.

Similarly, Ms. Evans explained how she uses YouTube to take the students on virtual field trips:

> I use it a lot of times to give my kids that real world visual that, you know, they probably are likely not going to get in their life, you know. I'm very fortunate where we live. We're very close to [a large major city], like 20 minutes away, but even though we're so close to it, most of my students have never even been there. And so, when we're talking about things is very hard for them to understand because they can't see it, they can't visualize it, and they haven't had that life experience. So, I like to use YouTube as a way to really bring some experiences to them so that they can see it. So as a virtual field trip kind of, and that's been great for them.

In additional to providing students with new experiences from a visual sense, teachers used social media to provide new perspectives and new frames of reference in a global sense. Ms. Denton teaches in an affluent school district and explained that many of her students are from conservative families and will not necessarily hear another

perspective on current events without providing them the opportunity through social media applications.

> I think that opening up to the students maybe like where to find views that aren't their own. You know, like if you only watch Fox News every day, you're going to get the same people who agree with you and it's going to be very easy to support your view. . . I think it's important that there are going to be times that they're going to read things that are going to make them question their own views. And I think that's important.

Ms. Charles succinctly noted that "social media has given us the access to is to say this is one little perspective and this is how the whole world can see it."

Relationship Building

One success that was common among seven of the nine participants was how social media helped them to cultivate relationships with their students. The teachers noticed that social media became a common ground. Ms. Denton reflected on the social emotional aspect of relationship building and revealed how social media helped her to reach her at-risk students. Ms. Evans and Ms. Boone both expressed how social media impacted their relationships with their students and how that led to an instructional benefit. Ms. Evans reflected:

> I think it's really actually helped me foster better relationships. So I've always had wonderful relationships with my students. I really pride myself on my relationships with them. but I think that when they see me trying to reach them

> where they are, that helps them trust me a little more and it helps them be more willing to try out what I'm working with.

Although Ms. Evans experience suggested that by building on the relationships with her students, the students were more inclined to engage with the learning, Ms. Boone explained how using social media gave her the opportunity to show her students that she was going to meet them at their level:

> It helps build the relationships with the teacher and the student. That the teacher's mindful of them and understands where they are and is willing to do what it takes to get them to the next level. I think social media helps with that.

Summary

With regard to the first research question, this study revealed several commonalities among the teachers' experiences when using social media as an instructional tool within their ELA classrooms. All of the participants noted the importance of using social media in ways that were meaningful and relevant to their instructional objectives. All of the participants reflected on experiences in teaching valuable participation, either for purposes of peer to peer feedback or for appropriateness in use and communication. Eight of the nine participants discussed experiences with social media networks used for teaching real world application. Six of the nine participants reflected on experiences using social media in ways to give the students a global perspective on their content.

With regard to the second research question, there were several notable successes that the teachers identified. Increased engagement and increased participation were both

experienced by eight of the nine participants. Seven of the nine participants expressed academic achievement and benefits to student learning when they incorporated social media into their instruction. Seven of the nine participants also stated that social media helped in building relationships with students, parents, and the community. Building relationships with parents and the community was not as common and is discussed further in Chapter 5.

With regard to the third research question, there was one significant challenge noted by seven of the nine participants: code switching. The teachers commented on the difficulties students had with separating social media for entertainment purposes and social media for educational purposes. One notable challenge discussed by five of the nine participants was the learning curve experienced by the teachers when beginning to incorporate social media into their lessons. Another notable concern revealed by five of the nine participants was the worry about getting into trouble for using social media. It is important to note that these challenges and concerns did not impede the usage of social media. None of the participants stopped using social media educationally with students as a result of these challenges. Instead, the code switching challenges were seen as opportunities to instruct the students on digital literacy and appropriate communication. The fear of getting into trouble caused the teachers to make sure their usage was in alignment with their instructional goals.

Chapter 5 continues with my analysis, discussing the interpretation of my findings. I will also discuss the limitations of my study, as well as recommendations for

future research. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the implications of my study and recommendations for practice when using social media as an instructional tool.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of ELA teachers in the United States who use social media as an instructional tool. Through semistructured, open-ended interviews, I contributed to the research on social media use in secondary and postsecondary classrooms. The goal of this study was to provide a better understanding of the impact and benefits of using social media as a learning tool as experienced by secondary school ELA teachers in the United States.

Throughout this exploration of teacher experiences when using social media applications with students for instructional purposes, several themes were revealed: meaningful instructional application, teaching valuable participation, real-world application, exposure to global perspectives, and relationship building. During my interviews with the teachers, the connection among these themes became apparent. The teachers were driven to add meaning and relevance to their instruction. They viewed social media applications as a way to connect their content and instruction to students' lives with an approach that was both engaging and relevant.

In addition to revealing best instructional practices for using social media networks as a tool within ELA classrooms, I also found that although the teachers faced challenges and had concerns similar to those noted in previous research, these challenges and concerns did not deter teachers from using social media as an educational tool. On the contrary, these challenges and concerns acted as an opportunity to embed digital literacy into their ELA content.

Interpretation of Findings

Studies of social media use in educational settings over the past 5 years revealed several themes including social media for the purpose of communication, building relationships, supporting classroom instruction, encouraging student engagement, and the challenges and concerns when using social media with students. The current study's focus was on the application of social media as an instructional tool. Given that scope, the findings included themes that were similar to those found in previous research.

Teaching and Learning

The implications of using social media as an instructional tool were generally confirmed with some contradictions to the findings from previous research. The responses of most of the participants confirmed the positive impact of social media on student engagement as reflected in the studies by Rap and Blonder (2016), Bozanta and Mardikyan (2017), Al-Rahmi and Zeki (2017), Chai and Fan (2016), and Hamid et al. (2015). Almost all of the participants in the current study noted an increased in student engagement when social media was incorporated into the instruction.

Another factor of student engagement that was noted in previous studies was the intention when planning activities using social media. Duffy and Ney's (2015) study of undergraduate students, educators, and industry professionals connected student engagement to social media activities that aligned to learning outcomes. The participants in my study were committed to ensuring that their implementation of social media within their instruction was relevant to their instructional objectives. In fact, the idea of using social media in ways that were tied closely to the learning goals was unanimously

discussed by the participants. Considering the findings of Duffy and Ney (2015), it is possible that the dedication to meaningful instructional application led to the significant increase in student engagement.

Building Relationships

In previous studies, particularly studies that focused on higher education, the benefit of relationship building was an unexpected result of the professors sharing their social media network profiles with students (Balcikanli, 2015; Imlawi et al., 2015; Sarapin & Morris, 2015; Sheldon, 2015). However, my participants indicated having a more active role with regard to social media providing opportunities to build relationships with their students. The teachers felt that by using social media, they were able to relate to the students by way of an application that was already a virtual meeting place of the students. The participants' perception was that the students appreciated the teachers taking an interest in something that was part of the students' lives. This willingness by the teachers to create a common ground helped to build trust with the students.

Challenges and Concerns: Perception Versus Reality

Throughout this study, I hoped to better understand the challenges experienced by teachers using social media as an educational tool. Previous studies revealed a contradiction between perception and reality of teachers' concerns. Teachers identified specific reasons why they did not use social media as an instructional tool including concerns of high risk, low safety, low usefulness, potential for distraction, and privacy (Akcayir, 2017; Kolokytha et al., 2015, Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Owen, Fox, & Bird, 2016; Qayyum et al., 2016) . However, it was not clear whether the participants in these

studies had experienced challenges as insurmountable obstacles when using social media or whether these were perceived concerns that kept the teachers from using social media at all.

In the current study, concerns or challenges were not viewed as insurmountable. In fact, each challenge was addressed as an opportunity to guide students in appropriate use. The participants did not mention any experiences of low usefulness or high risk as noted in Manca and Ranieri's (2016) study of the use and perceptions of social media by university professors in Italy. In fact, participants in my study were dedicated to making sure the social media applications had a high usefulness when connected to their instructional goals.

Privacy was a notable concern in previous research (Akcayir, 2017; Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015; Gammon & McGranahan, 2015; Greenhow & Askari, 2015; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Owen et al., 2016; Rap & Blonder, 2016; Sarapin & Morris, 2015). With regard to protecting students' privacy, participants in the current study created safeguards to ensure student privacy. Some teachers provided one social media account that was shared by all students. Other teachers required postings by the students to be approved by the teacher or posted by the teacher and the teacher would not use full names or allow pictures showing students' faces to be posted. One teacher, whose sophomore students used Instagram openly, experienced an issue when the students noticed someone following their account who was not part of the class or known to them personally. This opened a discussion about access, privacy, and how to portray oneself in an open online forum. In each of these experiences, the teachers used the challenge as a talking point to

guide their students through any potential issues that they may face when living and working in the digital age.

Conceptual Lenses

Connectivism. When exploring the participants' reflections within the framework of Siemens's (2005) connectivism, I observed the tenets of connectivism in teachers' experiences, including using external databases, sharing through peer networks, student-centered instruction, and engaging in networks of expertise. All nine of the participants reflected on ways in which they used social media applications for their students to collaborate or share with their peers. In some cases, the teachers collaborated with colleagues in other states or countries to provide their students with a larger network of peers. All nine participants noted the use of social media networks as an external database that acted as a resource for the students. In some cases, these external databases provided a visual reference as noted by Manca and Ranieri (2016). Other teachers opened up the networks for student research, vocabulary, and collaboration. Using the social media applications in this way often flipped the classroom from teacher centered to student centered and flipped the role of the teacher to facilitator of learning rather than the sole source of information.

Convergence culture. The participants' experiences were also evaluated within the framework of Jenkins's (2006) convergence culture. The idea of a convergence culture takes into account the impact of media platforms on society. In my examination of the academic use of social media platforms, the convergence culture constructs of

media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence were present in varying degrees.

Media convergence is the term coined by Jenkins (2006) to identify the change in the media industries and the change in how consumers interact with media. The participants in the current study did not directly identify media convergence; however, they did address the oversaturation of media in students' lives and the need for media literacy. The participants agreed with Jenkins (2006) on the importance of consumers (students) being able to evaluate media and being able to understand how the information presented within can manipulate values and behaviors. The teachers felt that teaching this level of digital literacy was part of their responsibility beyond teaching ELA content.

Discussions regarding the students' role as part of a participatory culture were the most prevalent among the three tenets of convergence culture. A major theme present in the study was the importance of teaching students how to contribute to online discussions in meaningful ways. The use of social media applications opened the door for more peer collaboration and heightening student engagement in the content, confirming the research of Carpenter and Krutka (2014) and Jenkins (2006). Also, as noted by Jenkins (2006), my participants experienced the reallocation of their responsibility of scaffolding of new skills only to themselves to a larger learning community.

The final tenant of a convergence culture is the development of a collective intelligence, in which the members of the virtual learning communities engage with the individual experts to share in the knowledge and expertise of that learning community (Jenkins, 2006). Although the participants in my study agreed that this is the ideal, their

students had not reached that level of collaborative learning. This may have been due to the age of the students or their maturity levels. Some teachers noted that their older students were closer to achieving a collective intelligence within their virtual learning communities, while their younger students required more guidance.

In considering the major themes in this study, I identified an overlap with the conceptual lens of convergence culture. Figure 7 shows how the themes of teaching valuable participation, exposure to global perspectives, and real-world application come together and create a convergence culture within the classroom. Additionally, valuable participation together with the exposure to global perspectives creates a participatory culture.

Figure 7. Relationship among the themes of meaningful participation, real-world application, global perspectives.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation to the study was that the selected participants were located in different cities across the United States, creating financial and practical obstacles in

completing face-to-face interviews. Video interviews alleviated this obstacle. Nonetheless, it created another limitation in that participants were required to be available and amenable to video interviews. My invitation to the study posted across multiple online ELA teacher networks provided me with 23 potential participants. However, only nine completed the interview process. Although nine participants enabled data saturation (see Hennink et al., 2017; Namey et al., 2016), nine participants limited the ability to recognize potentially relevant codes as described by Saldana (2016) who classified any code shared by one fourth of the participants as potentially relevant to the study. With only nine participants, one fourth equated to only two participants, which is arguably not adequate to merit value. A larger sample size would have provided a stronger confirmation of potentially relevant codes.

Another potential limitation was that some participants were teaching in districts and states that have partnered with EdLeader21 (2019) or Battelle for Kids' (2019b, 2019c) SOAR Network or Rural Collaborative Network, recognized for their initiatives in ensuring 21st-century readiness for their students. This may limit the generalizability of findings to all ELA teachers in the United States, particularly teachers in districts that do not support initiatives for 21st-century educational readiness. Similarly, this study provided a cross section of teachers from various school demographics, including variations in school funding and access to technology. Because social media applications require access to the technological hardware and software applications, the access to technology, or lack thereof, may have impacted the teachers' experiences, limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Recommendations

In addition to the themes noted, the interviews revealed potential focuses for further study. Some participants noted that using social media removed the barrier of time and physical location from the academic day and promoted student collaboration outside of the classroom. In addition, participants revealed the ability to stay in contact with their students while they were out of the classroom due to illness, professional development, or appointments. Although not addressed by most of the participants, the concept of social media networks offering flexibility of time and location confirmed the findings of Hamid et al. (2015). However, more research would provide data addressing the value of social media as an asynchronous learning platform.

Another concept that was indicative of further consideration and possible additional study was the credibility of sources. Several participants pointed out the potential for instruction regarding bias in media applications and identifying reputable sources. Using social media seemed to inherently lead to a discussion of what makes a source credible. A study with a larger participant pool may provide additional information with regard to how to use social media for this level of digital literacy.

In addition, several emergent themes were present that addressed aspects of teaching that were more organizational or administrative in nature including physical classroom space, planning and grading, and access to technology. Flexible classroom spaces have become a prominent discussion point among the educational community in recent years. A study on the impact of social media on the physical classroom layout may

provide additional considerations with regard to flexible learning spaces that has not been previously explored.

Access to technology was clearly a factor that affected the teachers' experiences. This study provided a cross section of school demographics. Some of the schools that the participants taught in had seemingly unlimited access to technology for the students and the teachers alike. Other participants worked in districts that had very limited access to technologies. More study is required to understand the full implications of how access to technologies affects the impact of social media as an educational tool. This study could be repeated within specific demographics, or comparatively across the demographics to gain a full scope of the impact.

Finally, some of the teachers observed the way in which their students were constantly inundated with information. These teachers expressed their concern that the students were not able to manage the barrage of information. Additional research on the addictive aspect of social media and the inability of students to ignore the constant deluge of information may provide teachers and parents with practices to guide their students through this aspect of living in a digital age.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for social change at the organizational level and the societal level. First, schools are tasked with preparing students for college and careers in a digital age. Peer collaboration, information and media literacy, global awareness, and critical thinking have been identified as necessary life skills for students as they prepare for entering college and careers in the 21st century

(Battelle for Kids, 2019a). The findings of this study confirm the relevancy of using social media applications for these skills. However, as noted by Greenlaw (2015) and Gretter and Yadav (2016), the typical learning experiences students have in the classroom do not wholly reflect the actual skills that are needed for college and career in the 21st century. The findings of this study provide a guide for teachers to use social media applications to align their teaching practices to the current needs of the digital age.

Previous studies note a hesitancy of teachers to use social media with students due to concerns over low perceived educational value, inexperience, technological self-efficacy, concerns of privacy and accessibility, and lack of institutional support (Akcaoglu & Bowman, 2016; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). However, the findings of this study revealed that although teachers do experience these challenges, they are able to integrate solutions into their planning and instructional practice so that these challenges do not become obstacles to the realized benefits of social media usage in academia.

The perceptions of the potential dangers or challenges to using social media with students has led to some school districts prohibiting the use of social media networks as resources (George et al., 2015; Schwarz & Caduri, 2016). This prohibition creates two significant issues. First, and most directly, prohibiting the use of social media networks in the classroom blocks the teachers from using innovative instructional practices that prepare students for college and career in a digital age and give the students practice in digital literacy. Secondly, school policies that disallow social media usage create a perception that social media lacks value as an educational tool.

The academic value of social media is already widely debated (Bartow, 2014; Asterhan & Rosenburg, 2015; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Sheldon, 2015). The teachers in this study were well aware of the negative perceptions of social media. Ultimately, this fear did not stop the teachers from using social media with students. These negative perceptions did cause the teachers to be diligent in making sure that they could prove how the usage of the social media application tied to the learning objectives. The findings of this study reveal the value and benefits of using social media applications as instructional tools. These finding provide a basis for the justification for opening up the access to these tools in educational settings rather than blocking teachers from using them.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the findings of this study confirmed the tenets of connectivism and convergence culture through the educational application of social media networks into instructional practice. Social media networks were shown to demonstrate the theory of connectivism as these networks acted as external databases for information retrieval. In addition, these applications provided a virtual collaborative space for both sharing within peer networks and creating networks of expertise. Finally, this study exposed how teachers were able to facilitate the students' construction of knowledge through the use of social media networks, transitioning the instruction from a teacher-centered model to a student-centered model.

This study also confirmed the connection between convergence culture and education. Created as a theory for media communications, convergence culture has not

been used as a theory for education. However, the results of this study revealed how using social media networks as an instructional tool prepares students to become active members of a participatory culture. Although the participants admitted that they would not experience their students contributing to the collective intelligence as the students participated in these networks, the participants did view this depth of participation as a goal.

Recommendations for Practice

The teachers' experiences demonstrated best instructional practices for using social media networks as a tool for the practice of 21st century competencies within ELA classrooms, particularly in avoiding and addressing challenges noted in previous studies. The participants expressed the importance of the work they did with the students prior to starting any activity that included social media applications. The teachers created ground rules and set expectations with regard to technology use in general and explicitly for the social media activity. Some teachers included the students in the rule setting, finding that when they did so the students were more successful in following the rules and engaged more in the activities.

The participants reflected on the impact including social media applications had on classroom management. Their experiences were inconsistent, with some teachers perceiving benefits to classroom management when utilizing social media and other noting it as a challenge. However, the teachers were consistent in noting the importance of diligence in monitoring the students' activity. When the teachers were actively monitoring the students as they used these tools, they had fewer behavioral issues and

fewer distractions. It is clear that although using social media creates a more student-centered approach, it does not alleviate the teacher from their responsibility of oversight.

The ways in which the teachers addressed challenges and concerns were multiple and varied. However, there were several habits revealed that indicate the best practices for solutions to common challenges. First, the teachers saw these challenges and concerns as opportunities to teach the students. They addressed issues as they occurred and used them as teachable moments. Second, the solutions, while varied, fit the situation, the students, and the teacher. Participants were clear that when using social media, teachers have to identify what works for them. The solutions should fit within the teachers' own practice and educational philosophy.

Conclusion

As we entered into the digital age, a new set of skills was required to address the complexities of a technologically driven society. However, our school systems have not maintained the same pace with regards to preparing students to be digitally literate (Gretter & Yadav, 2016). Moreover, some school districts shy away from the very applications that are prevalent in society. Although some view these applications as entertainment based only, social media applications have exceeded their role as entertainment to become interactive resources for information, collaboration, and communication. Social media provides opportunities for users to actively contribute to and interact with a knowledge base for any given topic. For educators, this has opened the door to new ways of engaging their students in creating their own learning experiences (Greenhow & Askari, 2015).

Regardless of the researched benefits of social media for educational use, previous research has also indicated negative perceptions, fears, and concerns surrounding these networks that keep teachers, administrators, and school districts from fully embracing social media as an instructional tool (Akcaoglu & Bowman, 2016; George et al., 2015; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Schwarz & Caduri, 2016). This dichotomy raised the question of what the actual experiences are of teachers who use social media networks within their instructional practices. This study revealed that the benefits of social media use as an instructional tool should not be understated. The implications and positive outcomes are not limited to the content area. In fact, social media applications allowed teachers to use their content area to address skills relevant to living in the 21st century, including digital literacy, collaboration, meaningful and appropriate participation, and understanding global perspectives.

Although concerns of previous research studies were present in the participants' experiences, these concerns should not deter teachers from utilizing social media with their students. For the participants in this study, these challenges became discussion points and opportunities for teaching appropriate communication, understanding one's digital footprint, media literacy, and critical thinking. Social media applications successfully provide teachers with an engaging and relevant approach in connecting their content and instruction to students' lives, as well as create opportunities to teach digital literacy within the teacher's content area.

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Appendix A: Online Questionnaire

1. Are you currently an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher in the United States?
   - Yes
   - No
2. Which grade levels do you currently teach? Check all that apply.
   - Grade 6
   - Grade 7
   - Grade 8
   - Grade 9
   - Grade 10
   - Grade 11
   - Grade 12
   - Other:
3. With which grades have you use social media as a learning tool? Check all that apply.
   - Grade 6
   - Grade 7
   - Grade 8
   - Grade 9
   - Grade 10
   - Grade 11

- Grade 12
- Other:

4. Which social media networks do you use with students for instructional purposes? Check all that apply.
    - Blogger
    - Diigo
    - Edmodo
    - Facebook
    - Google+
    - Instagram
    - LinkedIn
    - Pinterest
    - Quora
    - SnapChat
    - Skype
    - TeacherTube
    - TedEd
    - Tumblr
    - Twitter
    - Vimeo
    - Wikispaces Classroom
    - WordPress

- YouTube
- Other:

5. How frequently do you use these networks with students for instructional purposes?
    - At least once a week or more
    - At least once a month
    - At least once within each instructional unit
    - At least once each marking period
    - At least once a semester
    - At least once a year
    - More infrequently than once a year
6. When is the last time you used these networks with students for instructional purposes?
    - I currently use one or more social media networks for instructional purposes.
    - I don't currently use any social media networks with students for instructional purposes; but I have used one or more social media networks for instructional purposes within the past year.
    - I don't currently use any social media networks with students for instructional purposes; but I have used one or more social media networks for instructional purposes within the past two years.

- I haven't use any social media networks with students for instructional purposes within the past two years.
- I have never used social media networks for instructional purposes.

7. Would you be willing to participate in an interview about your experiences using social media with students as an instructional tool?
   - Yes
   - No

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Phenomenon of Interest: The lived experiences of secondary ELA teachers in the continental United States using social media as a tool for instruction.

Central Research Questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of secondary school ELA teachers in the when using social media as an instructional tool?

RQ2: What are the successes experienced by ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

RQ3: What are the challenges experienced by ELA teachers when using social media as an instructional tool?

Concepts to explore:

- Using social media to support instruction
- Using social media for curriculum/classroom learning activities
- Teaching in a participatory culture
- Using a participatory culture for instruction
- The role and value of collective intelligence in instruction
- The role and value of virtual networks for teaching
- Social media's impact on education: teacher centered versus student centered

Introductory Statement

Thank you for allowing me to interview you today. The focus of this interview is to explore your experiences when using social media with students as an instructional tool. For the sake of this study, social media is defined as any Internet-based platform

that is participatory, interactive, and allows user-generated content to be shared with other users of the same application. Please be assured that your responses to these questions will remain confidential. Any identifying characteristics of the participants will remain within my notes but will not be revealed within the study. Whenever possible, please provide narrative examples of your experiences, including your thoughts and reflections within the experience. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your professional background
    - *Note:*
        a) *Years teaching*
        b) *Grade levels*
        c) *Content area focus*
2. Let's explore your experiences with technology for educational purposes. Share a bit about your background and experiences with internet use as an instructional tool with students.
3. Please expand on your comfort level with working with new technologies.
4. What are you doing or have you done with social media in your classroom?
    - *Note:*
        a) Experiences with social media, including platforms used
        b) Experiences within the framework of media convergence
        c) Level of participation (participatory culture)

d) *Utilization of the expertise within these networks, e.g. following experts or organization (collective intelligence)*

e) *Student participation and engagement.*

f) *Activities for student practice, learning or mastery of instructional goals*

5. What are your reasons for adding social media to your classes?
6. What are the major changes in your instruction as a result of using social media?

- *Note:*

a) *Classroom organization or design.*

b) *Teaching*

c) *Planning*

d) *Instructional goals and goal setting*

e) *Classroom management*

7. Why is it important for your students to interact in social media?
8. What challenges have you experienced in using social media as a learning tool with students?

a) How did you address or overcome these challenges?

9. Please explain any reservations or concerns you have with regard to social media networks used within educational settings.

a) How have you addressed these reservations?

10. What are the educational benefits you have experienced when social media as a learning tool with students?
11. Is there anything additional you would like to share about your experiences with social media as an educational tool?

Closing Statement

Thank again for your time and sharing your thoughts with me. Your contribution to this process is invaluable to our understanding of teachers' experiences when using social media as a teaching tool. This knowledge may contribute to our collective teacher toolbox, as we think about educational innovations and preparing our students for learning in the 21st century.