Chapter 14

Social Media and Foreign Language Teacher Education: Beliefs and Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will focus on examining how instructors who are preparing foreign language teachers, both pre-service and in-service, integrate social media in their teaching practices to gain more insights on what beliefs these instructors hold and what differences and similarities between their beliefs and actual teaching practices about social media integration in foreign language teacher education. The chapter will first provide a literature review about the general beliefs that instructors held on the integration of social media and foreign language teacher education. Next, promising examples of the integration of social media in foreign language teacher education will be provided. Last but not least, affordances and challenges of the integration of social media and foreign language teacher education will be discussed, followed by implications and future directions.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged and been widely adopted in many areas including education. Social media, a term often used interchangeably with Web 2.0, refers to online applications that promote users, their interconnections, and user-generated content (Cormode & Krishnamurthy 2008). In this chapter, the term social media refers to online applications that promote users, their interconnections, and user-generated content (Cormode & Krishnamurthy 2008), including social network sites (SNS) like Facebook and MySpace; video-sharing sites like YouTube; image-sharing sites like Flickr, Tumblr and Pinterest; collaborative knowledge development through wikis; and microblogging sites like Twitter (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012).

Based on survey results (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2012), social media usage in the United States has increased noticeably: 65% of adult Internet users claim they use social media like MySpace,
Facebook. The *social media* adoption rate has increased 4% from 2011 (61%) and more than doubled comparing with the results reported in 2008 (29%). Moreover, major *social media* (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) have gained increase in the number of active users. For instance, Facebook, at the end of 2011, had 133 million users in the United States and 845 million active users globally — about 54% of the world’s online population; Twitter, with over 24 million active users in the United States, has also increased over 30% from 2011. All these increasing numbers suggest that *social media* becomes more and more popular and even a part of people’s lives globally, which, in turn, calls for attention from educators and researchers to explore the affordances and challenges of using social media in- and outside of classroom settings.

In the field of education, many researchers have started to explore how to incorporate *social media* into teaching and learning. In terms of students’ learning, many scholars argue that *social media* practices can facilitate new forms of collaborative knowledge construction (Cress & Kimmerle, 2008; Greenhow, 2011; Greenhow & Li, 2013; Larusson & Alterman, 2009), communication (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009a), identity work (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009b), social capital (Greenhow & Burton, 2011; Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009), and civic participation in the online-offline community (Greenhow, 2011; Robelia, Greenhow & Burton, 2011). Moreover, faculty members are adopting *social media* increasingly for both their personal and professional purposes. Based on a large survey conducted by Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011), over 90% of faculty members were aware of *social media*, such as Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs, and over 90% of all higher education teaching faculty members are using *social media* in courses they’re teaching or for their professional careers outside the classroom.

However, the increasing awareness and adoption of *social media* does not necessarily indicate effectiveness or value in education. Just like Levy (2009) argued, “effective transfer depends, to a large degree, on the affordances of the particular technology and the ways its strengths and limitations may be coordinated and managed as a pedagogical tool (p. 778).” Due to the evolution of technology and the increasing need for preparing teachers with a better understanding of how to use technology in their classrooms, educational researchers have been exploring the integration of *social media* and what affordances and challenges can be identified in teaching and learning. Amongst various areas of interests in education, foreign language teacher education has been researched in the relationship between technology and pedagogy, especially for foreign language teachers who teach language other than English (Garrett, 2009).

In the field of foreign language teacher education, research has been focused more on pre-service teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, technological knowledge construct, and learning outcomes, including: 1) evaluating programs for technology integration (Mayo, Kajs, & Tanguma 2005); 2) audits of pre-service teachers’ technological skill (Banister & Vannatta, 2005); 3) assessing the conceptualization of the complicated relationship between pedagogy, technology and discipline specific content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Rienties, Brouwer, & Lygo-Baker, 2013); and 4) pre-service teachers’ confidence (Topper, 2004). Only a few studies (e.g., Georgina & Hosford, 2009) examined how instructors integrate technology in foreign language teacher education. Admittedly, some researchers have begun to use *social media* tools, such as Blogs, Wikis, to cultivate language teachers’ writing skills in various languages with a focus on self-expression, creativity, ownership, and community building (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Kessler, 2009). However, these studies do not provide enough information about what beliefs instructors held about the integration of *social media* and foreign language teacher education.
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