

Social Scholars: Educators' Digital Identity Construction in Open, Online Learning Environments

Literacy Research: Theory,

Method, and Practice

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Abstract

The #WalkMyWorld project was an open, social media experiment developed to provide preservice and in-service teachers and K–12 students with an opportunity to focus on developing media literacies and civic engagement in online spaces. The study employed a basic interpretative qualitative study approach (Merriam, 2002) to examine how online social environments can be used as a vehicle to engage educators in the creation and sharing of online content, as it relates to multimodal meaning making, social scholarship, and identity construction. For this study, identity construction was identified as visually representing an aspect of an individual's life using any preferred medium, and sharing it through Twitter using the #WalkMyWorld hashtag. Results suggest three different categories in which participants viewed the activity of identity construction: (a) embraced similar identities, (b) established separate identities, or (c) resisted creating an online identity. As educators engage students with reading and writing digital content within social and connected learning environments, it is important to consider the creation and curation of an individual's digital identity in social scholarship practices.

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Introduction

Educators need opportunities to explore, examine, and create online representations of their identity (Bolter, Grusin, & Grusin, 2000; Tierney et al., 1997). This also requires an examination of an individual's identity while merging ontological narrative, embodiment, and meaning-making orientation (Smith, 2010; Stahl, 2003). These skills prove integral to the way teachers viewed themselves as professionals in online and hybrid educational spaces (Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit, & McCloskey, 2008).

The #WalkMyWorld project was an open, social media experiment developed to provide preservice and in-service teachers and K–12 students with an opportunity to focus on developing media literacies and civic engagement in online spaces. For 10 weeks, participants shared images, videos, and text on Twitter using the hashtag #WalkMyWorld. The hashtag was selected to indicate the need for individuals to interact in online spaces and in doing so allow others to “walk in your world.” The project allowed educators to engage in the process of multimodal meaning making with various digital texts and tools (Bruner, 1990; Bruner & Haste, 2010; Singer, 2004).

Participants worked openly online to create a community of inquiry exploring uses of social media as a tool for focusing on media literacies (Garrison, Kanuka, & Hawes, 2006). In this work, educators manipulated and remixed digital content within a social and connected learning environment. This study explored the following research question: How do preservice and in-service teachers perceive the creation and sharing of online content as it relates to their socially constructed digital identity as educators?

Theoretical Perspectives

The nature of literacy, multicultural education, and inclusion of information communication technologies (ICT) demand an expanded view of “text” to include visual, digital, and other multimodal formats (Alvermann, 2002; New London Group, 1996; Rose & Meyer, 2002). A richer and more complex definition of literacy thus requires a richer and more complex theoretical framing of literacy research (Leu, O'Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009). In this study, we used a multiple theoretical perspective approach (Labbo & Reinking, 1999) that incorporated perspectives from multiliteracies design (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), social scholarship (Greenhow, 2009), and identity as a literacy practice (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009).

Multiliteracies Design

Based on elements of critical literacy and new literacies, a multiliteracies perspective is built on a pedagogical agenda of social change to develop “active designers of

social futures” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Multiliteracies as a perspective includes a belief in having students read the word and at the same time read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This literacy practice integrates the teaching of reading and writing (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) in the use of the ICT. Pedagogy defined by multiliteracies theory and influenced by elements of multimodal design builds aspects of critical engagement between students and text to promote civic engagement in online spaces.

These new realities and possibilities require a new set of skills not fully defined in the term literacy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009) and as a result require that we modify educators’ understanding of instruction in literacy-based practices. This definition of literacy has expanded to being able to communicate, collaborate, interact, synthesize, comprehend, read, and write in the context of the digital, multimodal environments and technologies (Duke, Schmar-Dobler, & Zhang, 2006). Anstey and Bull (2006) conceptualize multiliteracy as a multitude of literacies that students need to develop while in schools to enable problem solving and critical thinking. Embedded in discussions about multiliteracies and multimodal design is a consideration and discussion about issues of identity.

Social Scholarship

Social scholarship utilizes ICTs to evolve the ways in which scholarship is conducted (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009). Social scholarship as a process is designed to connect formal scholarship with informal, social Internet-based civic practices while embodying specific values (e.g., openness, collaboration, transparency, access, and sharing; Ellison, 2007; Greenhow, 2009; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). In effect, when a learner attempts to create meaning in the world, the associated activities can be viewed as collective socio-collaborative acts of meaning that impact their educational and social identities.

Educators and their students need to recognize and use these social media texts as readers and writers in online spaces (O’Byrne, 2014). The Internet should profoundly affect scholarly relations because education and scholarship should not be silent, solitary, or ruminative (Kessler, 2000). Social scholarship promotes an educational identity and purpose while stimulating discussion of theory and pedagogy (Greenhow et al., 2009; North, 2006). Ideas are ultimately transmitted more quickly and innovatively than in formal journals and channels which may be constrained by issues of publication, access, and location.

Identity as a Literacy Practice

Presented conceptions of personal identity are socially constructed, multiple, and situated (Lam, 2000). These socially constructed representations are developed by the ways in which we view ourselves and represent our knowledge, experiences, and social connections (Compton-Lilly, 2006). From a literacy perspective, the identities that we construct shape our literacy practices, while our practice helps determine a

means for acting out the identities we assume (McCarthy & Moje, 2002). Ultimately, an individual's identity mediates and is mediated "by the texts they read, write, and talk about" (Moje et al., 2009, p. 416).

Consistent with aspects of identity construction in literacy contexts, there is a certain amount of positioning (Davies & Harre, 1999) that occurs as individuals construct the identity they want to represent to a given community. This holds that individuals use language and other tools to communicate and demonstrate understanding of types of behaviors and personal characteristics in a given community. Using this understanding, the individual can then choose to adopt and assimilate patterns of behaviors and personal characteristics to position himself or herself as a certain type of person (Bakhtin, 1937). When extended to a complete community, there is a general, sometimes unspoken, collective agreement regarding how to identify individuals and the behaviors or personal characteristics associated with presented identities (Wortham, 2006). Identity designations are powerful forces that can have an effect on not only how an individual reads and writes but also how others in the community label the individual and the way in which the individual views him or herself (Baker & Freebody, 1989; Liu & Hilton, 2005).

Method

The study employed a basic interpretative qualitative study approach (Merriam, 2002) to examine how preservice and in-service teachers perceive the creation and sharing of online content, as it relates to multimodal meaning making, social scholarship, and identity construction. In a basic interpretative qualitative study, researchers strive to understand the meaning people constructed from their world and their experiences. This approach was well suited for our research question, as it allowed us to understand how the participants made sense of their experience in the #WalkMyWorld project. The study was conducted for 10 weeks during the 2014 spring trimester.

Context and Participants

The #WalkMyWorld project. The project began as a collection of college instructors teaching students at their respective campuses and connecting openly online through the use of the collective #WalkMyWorld hashtag on Twitter. Individuals worked openly online to create a community of inquiry exploring various social media tools for focusing on media literacies (Garrison et al., 2006) and allowing us to engage with educators in the process of multimodal meaning making (Bruner, 1990; Bruner & Haste, 2010; Singer, 2004). As a result of these connections happening openly online, other participants joined the project in the fashion of an open educational learning experience or a massive open online course (MOOC; Graham, LaBonte, Roberts, O'Byrne, & Osterhout, 2014).

Because the study was conducted in an open online environment, it is important to note it is unknown how many individuals participated in the #WalkMyWorld project. Therefore, we are presenting a portion of the findings from a convenience sample of 21 preservice and 5 in-service educators enrolled in a graduate-level educational

program at a small private university in the northeastern part of the United States. All participants in the convenience sample were enrolled in an intensive yearlong education program that was taught by one of the researchers (O'Byrne).

We worked collaboratively with the collection of instructors who developed and facilitated the larger MOOC version of the #WalkMyWorld Project. Therefore, we acted as facilitators and guides in the larger #WalkMyWorld Project while at the same time prompting and collecting data from study participants. We selected this convenience sample of participants because ease of face-to-face access allowed us to support, interview, and obtain permissions from participants. As researchers, our role was to act as investigators and participants through narrative inquiry as an analytic and philosophical framework to model civic engagement with digital words and worlds.

Participants in the study were between the ages of 19 and 59 years old with 70% falling under the age range of 19–29 years ($n = 17$); 58% were females ($n = 15$) and 42% were males ($n = 11$). Most of the participants were preservice or in-service secondary teachers (5 middle school and 19 high school) with only two participants teaching at the elementary level. The secondary teachers report teaching a range of subject areas including science ($n = 8$), math ($n = 7$), history/social studies ($n = 5$), English/English Language Arts (ELA) ($n = 2$), library ($n = 1$), and music ($n = 1$). The two elementary teachers reported teaching all subject areas throughout the day.

Participants were given face-to-face training and access to multimodal tutorials. This training was meant to familiarize participants with how to use Twitter, Instagram (<http://instagram.com/>), and Vine (<https://vine.co/>) as ways to share content. Each tutorial explained the affordances of the tool, procedures for creating an account, and how to use the various photo and video capture functions to create meaning. An example of these tutorials includes an overview of Twitter available on the following webpage <https://sites.google.com/site/walkmyworldproject/twitter-tutorial>.

For 10 weeks, participants created and shared visual representations of aspects of their lives using any preferred medium, such as images or videos, using the #WalkMyWorld hashtag as they explored various aspects of their digital identity. Throughout the project, many participants blogged about their experiences and shared their private histories through multimodal representations. In this first year of the #WalkMyWorld project (2014), we did not provide guidance or tutorials for participants to discuss decisions to make while developing or constructing their online identity. In subsequent versions of the project, we included more detailed guidance focusing on development and construction of a digital identity. For more information on the project, learning events, and tutorials shared please visit the following website: <https://sites.google.com/site/walkmyworldproject/>.

Data Sources

Student submissions on Twitter and Storify. Weekly learning events in the form of blog posts prompted participants to explore the nature of online information and capture a *walk* in their *world*. Participants responded to the prompts on Twitter by creating and

sharing digital content comprised of text, video, image, or audio media. Even though participants were given freedom to decide *what* to share using a variety of media tools, they were asked to post at least once a week using the #WalkMyWorld hashtag.

At the completion of the #WalkMyWorld project, participants were asked to compile all of their content shared over the course of the project in an online curation tool known as Storify (<https://storify.com/>). Storify is an online tool that can be used to create stories or personalized narratives using social media texts (e.g., Twitter tweets, Facebook posts, and YouTube videos). As they curated and shared their body of work in the project, they were asked to reflect on the process and indicate what this work shared about their digital identity.

Survey of literacy and identity within digital environments instrument. The Survey of Literacy and Identity within Digital Environments (SLIDE) was constructed to collect demographic information about participants. The SLIDE instrument also collected information about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that participants used as they constructed and shared content openly online. Items from the SLIDE also helped us understand participants' perspectives about work in the project and the impact social scholarship had on their identity construction and teaching and learning in their classroom. A full listing of the items in the SLIDE is available at the following website (<http://wiobyrne.com/slide/>).

Researcher field notes. Field notes included observational notes collected during the study by both researchers. The notes included observations of individual and group discussions in class as well as instructor support in class and online. Notes were collected for 3 weeks before the study began while developing course materials and elements of the #WalkMyWorld project. The notes were also taken 2 days/week over the course of the study. We reviewed and synthesized these notes once a week and shared these syntheses with colleagues that helped facilitate the #WalkMyWorld project who added additional insight into the notes' content. We also collected notes on specific strategies used, modifications made, or problems encountered during the study. A synthesis of these notes was also published openly online as blog posts for the purposes of the members of the project that were not enrolled as students in our classes.

Data Collection and Analysis

As indicated earlier, data were collected over the course of 10 weeks of the #WalkMyWorld project. Qualitative data on participants were collected and analyzed to answer the research question. Critical to the process of qualitative data analysis is ensuring that data collection, management, and analysis operate in concert. Therefore, consistent with qualitative research guidelines, these three processes occurred simultaneously throughout the duration of the study (Merriam, 2002). This process ensured the recursive nature of data collection and analysis necessary in naturalistic qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2005). As researchers, our role was to engage as investigators and

participants through generic inquiry as an analytic and philosophical framework to model social scholarship (Ellison, 2007; Greenhow, 2009) and engagement with digital words and worlds.

Description of survey analysis. An initial descriptive analysis was conducted using results from all participants who completed the project and SLIDE ($n = 26$). This descriptive analysis was conducted to better understand participant engagement in the #WalkMyWorld project and inform the research question.

Open response item data were analyzed in a multistep process to recognize patterns and to develop themes (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2005). The first step was to closely examine the data using open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) by reading each survey response individually to record salient quotes and note emerging themes. The researchers developed their own list of codes representing identified themes and then shared codes to compare analysis. At this time, codes were revised, if needed, to best reflect a more thorough analysis of the data. Then, we cross-checked coding categories and themes with survey responses grouped by age, gender, and subject area. Any categories or themes that did not have strong supportive evidence uncovered from data analysis were discarded. After a first round of coding, we conducted a priori coding that was determined during the initial coding. To ensure a common approach to coding and analysis, we coded ten open-ended responses together. Finally, we coded the remaining responses independently and met to compare findings. All disagreements were discussed until 100% agreement was reached.

Integration of qualitative data. At the conclusion of the analysis of SLIDE data, an examination of the codes and initial themes was conducted to determine whether they were representative of the research questions. This phase of analysis involved an iterative process that included reorganizing the data and reconnecting groupings across all qualitative data sources (e.g., student project submissions, researcher field notes, and themes identified from SLIDE responses) to allow identified category structures and themes to adequately represent trends in the data. Constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 2009) were then used across all codes to collapse the preliminary codes into categories. During this process, we took three passes through the data in which we individually reviewed the themes and analyzed the findings with the purpose of examining digital identity. After each pass through the data, we met to discuss our individual findings and come to a consensus on the findings. We also shared the themes and obtained findings with the other organizers in the #WalkMyWorld project MOOC to allow them to provide feedback.

Findings

This study explored how online social environments can be used as a vehicle to engage educators in social scholarship and digital identity construction. In this study, identity construction was identified as visually representing an aspect of an

Table 1. Participant Social Media Practices Prior to #WalkMyWorld.

	Several Times a Day (%)	Once a Day (%)	Several Times a Week (%)	Once a Week (%)	Once a Month (%)	Never (%)
Reading and watching	15	8	35	15	19	8
Creating and writing	7	0	12	35	38	8

individual’s life using any preferred digital medium and sharing it out through Twitter using the #WalkMyWorld hashtag. As educators engage students with reading and writing digital content within social and connected learning environments, it is important to consider the creation and curation of an individual’s digital identity in social scholarship practices.

Educators Shifted From Consumers to Producers of Digital Content

The #WalkMyWorld project provided opportunities for novice learners to explore and play with digital tools as they constructed their digital identity. Participants described their engagement in #WalkMyWorld as an opportunity to share a part of their real life with others instead of just submitting assignments to the teacher. Typical responses include, “I enjoyed creating small video clips that entertained my followers. The project helped me express my personality and show my funny characteristics.” Data analysis revealed a reflective and recursive process as participants created and shared digital content in connected learning spaces.

The majority of participants stated their purpose for engaging in social media prior to the project was to share their experiences with family and friends. Only 2 of the 26 participants reported engaging with social media for educational related purposes. Furthermore, SLIDE questions that asked participants to describe their previous experience for creating and sharing digital content revealed 24 participants (19 preservice and 5 in-service) had engaged in social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) before networking through the #WalkMyWorld project. However, the frequency of their digital literacy practices fell along a continuum from engaging several times a day to once a month (see Table 1). Results suggest the majority of participants engaged as readers several times a week but only engaged as writers once a month. In other words, before the #WalkMyWorld project, participants were more likely to be consumers (i.e., reading and watching) rather than producers of their own content, regardless of the type of social media used. As a result, there was a slight tension for some participants as their previous use of social media was for personal use, not the pedagogical reasons identified in the #WalkMyWorld project.

Participants started each learning event engaging with online content and were encouraged to share for a purpose other than for personal or private purposes. This proved to be a challenge for some individuals because to engage with others online, participants needed to learn how to use the digital tools. The simple act of using the

digital texts and tools deepened their understanding of how to use digital content to make meaning. More specifically, the affordances of certain tools and participant dexterity with the use of different tools determined the overall success and ultimate sharing of the created work product.

Results suggest increased engagement in the #WalkMyWorld project motivated participants to create and share their own original digital content. In the beginning, participants shared pictures of objects or places that represented their surroundings or displayed friends and family events. As the project continued, participants began to replace pictures of friends by turning the camera on themselves in order to reflect or share personal achievements. Most participants explained their journey as a reflective process. “In the beginning, I shared experiences as they happened to me. As time went on, I began to think about why I was actually sharing what I was sharing. Thinking about the reason behind this I started trying to share things I could question, or explore more than the typical *so this happened*.” Participants increasingly viewed the possibilities that exist for social scholarship in digital spaces over the course of the study.

Even as participants were encouraged to experiment with writing across different modes (e.g., audio, images, text, and video), a lack of experience with digital media tools constrained meaning making. Participants reported that Twitter and Vine were new social media platforms that required different skills than they had previously developed. One common statement across the sample explained, “I forgot to put a hashtag on a Vine video once and discovered there was no way to rectify this tiny error. I guess I learned that even when you’re just playing around, you will encounter frustrations based on the limitations of technology.” Another repeated comment shared, “Vine was challenging to use so I found myself sharing images more than other modes.” Although participants shifted their engagement from consumers of digital content to creating and sharing digital content, their multimodal meaning making remained at a basic level of tweeted texts and images.

Educators Increased Engagement of Digital Tools for Social Scholarship

The #WalkMyWorld project provided opportunities for educators to increase their engagement within a social and connected learning environment. Participants negotiating these intersections within discourse systems encountered fundamental decisions that needed to be considered while creating digital content. All participants shared instances where they changed either the process they used to share or the product they ultimately shared during the #WalkMyWorld project.

While the majority of the participants were familiar with Facebook, they had not used other social media platforms like Instagram, Storify, Twitter, or Vine. For example, 15 participants (14 preservice and 1 in-service) reported their engagement in the project made them aware of the variety of digital tools available to create and share digital media. Many teachers explained how learning new digital tools improved their ability to share more frequently. Specifically, educators explained, “Occasionally I

Table 2. Categories of Digital Identity Construction.

Digital Identity Category	# Of Participants	Rational
Embraced similar identities	14	Authenticity
Established separate identities	9	Audience awareness
Resisted creating a digital identity	3	No value

would upload pictures from my digital camera (how old school!) to Facebook after a big family event. I began sharing more about my day to day life—hobbies, interests, little bits of my life with others.” Furthermore, 11 preservice teachers shared instances in which the project broadened their understanding of digital texts to include images and video. The majorities of participants explained that they had a greater appreciation of the concept of text and understood the benefits of using videos, simulations, pictures, cartoons, and other forms of text.

As it relates to social scholarship, several participants noted a greater appreciation of networking beyond Facebook. Eleven participants (eight preservice and three in-service) explained how they changed what they thought was important to share by thinking deeper about how and why they engage with social media. The #WalkMyWorld project exposed participants to the possibility of Twitter as a great communication tool to share images and texts and a tool for gathering resources concerning integration of technology within the classroom. These perceptions reflect a deeper understanding of how participating in acts of social scholarship evoke exploration and collaboration with different digital tools.

Educators Analyzed and Constructed Representations of Their Digital Identity

The #WalkMyWorld project provided opportunities for participants to think about their digital identity as an educator. Participants were divided into three categories based on how they viewed the activity of identity construction: (a) embraced similar identities, (b) established separate identities, or (c) resisted creating an online identity. These data are presented in Table 2.

Embraced similar identities. First, most participants made a deliberate decision to share genuine, sincere digital content to ensure their posts would be an authentic representation of their interests and values. For example, 14 participants (12 preservice and 2 in-service) stated there was no difference between their online and off-line identity. In some instances, participants described their digital identity as “as on open book” and willing to share everything. One participant boldly stated, “I’m me no matter the way it’s presented to others.”

Results suggest the ways in which participants embraced similar identities included a variety of images about personal events, Vine videos about family and friends, and texts sharing their daily emotions. For instance, shared digital content included

photos of participants studying, dating, or going to sporting events. Similarly, a pre-service teacher posted photos of her puppy and an event celebrating her boyfriend's graduation. Most participants in this category explained, "I believe that what I post online is a representation of myself in person. I tweet the way I talk because I want it to be as authentic as possible." There were also tweets that revealed participants' interests and surroundings such as images about fishing and humorous scientific cartoons about cells.

Other responses focused on how their online identity, while still the same, was "under construction." For example, preservice teachers shared how they included only things that truly represented their interests but that their digital identity was still under construction as it was relatively recent compared to the off-line identity they had been developing for 22 years. These findings reveal the participants in this group were keenly aware of their own identity and the willingness, or lack thereof, to promote or obfuscate this identity online.

Established different identities. Second, a smaller subset of participants indicated that they chose to establish a different digital identity for the project. The 9 participants (6 preservice and 3 in-service) in this group indicated an awareness of networked audiences and the impact this had on their identity creation. These participants explained how they established two different digital identities because they understood their audience and needed to retain a professional identity. Across this sample, participants stated, "I tailored my identity to reflect a more professional and academic persona. I listen to obscene music and watch crass television shows. I drink, smoke, and stay up late. For those individuals whom I know personally, I am open and honest about my character. For the digital world, I am much more reserved." Other participants reflected how their online identities changed for reputation, privacy, and liability reasons. As a result, they were careful not to include images that they felt would diminish their image as a professional.

On the other hand, some participants indicated that they established two different identities because of concerns about an unknown or unseen audience. This presented a challenge for some participants as they tried to negotiate multiple representations of their identity while learning new literacy practices. Participants shared the challenges of identifying content they wanted to share while modifying or not sharing content they did not want to share openly. One preservice teacher stated, "I am a bit more private about what I share online versus my offline identity." At the same time, participants began to feel less afraid and more confident about sharing digital content. Many participants explained how they began to feel less inhibited and used their voice for important issues. In fact, many participants mentioned how engaging in social scholarship through the #WalkMyWorld project motivated them to think deeper about how their posts would be perceived by a public audience.

Resisted creating a digital identity. Third, a small but important number of participants resisted creating a digital identity. A common statement across these three participants

included, "I keep my life simple and don't buy into social media." As a result, they perceived little to no value in creating an online identity or engaging in social scholarship.

A closer analysis of the curated tweets within Storify revealed all three participants were preservice teachers who posted no more than 10 tweets, meeting the basic requirement of each learning event. Although each participant in this group used words to share at least one personal event or opinion, none of their posts included personal images, video, or audio content. Findings revealed two of the participants created a Twitter account name that included their initials and the initials of the university. This type of Twitter username suggests an intentional decision to remain anonymous and a resistance to engaging in social scholarship.

For instance, a preservice teacher reported, "If my life were more interesting, I might have enjoyed #WalkMyWorld more, but it was just a class project." This participant tweeted pictures of the weather and comments about the difficulty of graduate school. A second participant who resisted creating an online identity reported never having a Twitter account before and that this was just a class project by stating, "I do not typically share much on digital media, so I feel silly throwing things out there without really having a purpose." His tweets consisted of YouTube videos of musicians, pictures of the weather, and only one personal message about becoming a father. For example the tweet read, "Hospital bags packed, will be a daddy in less than two days."

The third participant used her real first name as her Twitter name but stated, "I am very uncomfortable participating in social media." She goes on to explain, "I don't want to have a digital self and a real self." Her 10 tweets included pictures of food, the weather, and two text haiku poems about school. This group of three participants provided an important contrast to embracing similar or establishing different digital identities. Overall, these findings shed more insight into the challenges that exist as educators coconstruct digital identities in shared learning spaces (Musanti & Pence, 2010).

Discussion and Implications

Educators must prepare students to be the multiliterate individuals who they will need to be successful in their futures (Kellner, 2006). The #WalkMyWorld project highlighted the spaces provided by collaborative technologies for participants to engage in meaning making in order to release the harnessed potential of said technologies. In this milieu, schools are ultimately responsible for preparing students to be critical users of available technologies (Damarin, 2000; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004), problem solvers, and good communicators in networked civic spaces (Binkley et al., 2012; Mishra & Kereluik, 2011). Complicating this is the very real concern that educators may not themselves have technological, pedagogical, content area knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) required to embed these literacies in instruction. Additionally, as educators shift their instructional approaches to integrate

technology, they must also consider how they portray themselves in person and in online interactions.

It should be noted that many of the participants in the project needed real opportunities to experience and play with educational technologies to be able to participate effectively. The #WalkMyWorld project made them aware of the variety of digital texts and tools available to create and share in online spaces. Exposure through multiple modes of text gave participants a greater opportunity to communicate and model social scholarship in open, online learning environments. Opportunities such as this are important learning experiences as classrooms increasingly integrate new and digital literacies. Teachers need real opportunities to experience technology before we can expect them to use it with children in the classroom (Kimmons, 2014).

The key factor appears to be a general understanding about the identity the educator wants to portray and construct in these online spaces, and the experience or expertise they have in these literacies. Put simply, participants who were experienced with sharing content online for their own predetermined purposes were less able to profit from the experience. Further research is needed to better understand these findings. Furthermore, participants were keenly aware of the socially constructed role of educators in society. Participants indicated that they considered their construction of identity within the context of this study. More savvy constructors and users of these digital spaces chose to exemplify this socially constructed model of an educator. Alternatively, some participants chose to modify or distort representations of their digital identity as a critique to established archetypes. Many of these decisions indicated a strong understanding of risk awareness and aversion.

This study provides some insight into identity construction practices in digital spaces for preservice and in-service educators. Despite these findings, there is still disagreement on the part of school districts about how much of a digital presence educators should have. Furthermore, little instruction is provided for educators in preservice teacher programs or in professional development opportunities to help them create and curate an online persona. There is a need to empower educators to know and understand a policy regarding their use of digital spaces for digital identity construction that is flexible yet still protects teachers and students (O'Byrne, Roberts, LaBonte, & Graham, 2014). Finally, educators need opportunities to act as networked, social scholars as they read, write, and connect online and in hybrid spaces (McVerry, Belshaw, & O'Byrne, 2015). Research such as this identifies opportunities for educators to engage in social scholarship practices, however, there are lingering policy issues that would detract or scare off preservice and in-service educators from developing and curating an online identity.

Additional research is also needed to determine the motivation behind the construction of an educator's digital literacy practices and identity construction. It is unclear in this work whether the purpose, audience, or affordances of the social media platform mitigate the decisions made by participants. As individuals construct identity in online and hybrid social spaces, there is often a decision that needs to be made not only about what identity to construct but also about developing different identities. This decision

may be the result of socially constructed expectations, it may also be due to personal safety and security concerns the participants would rather remain private.

Questions remain unanswered as to whether or not an individual is not being *authentic*, or is *fake* if they develop different online personas, or choose not to share online. Furthermore, if an individual does chose to share, are they being narcissistic, and does this ultimately indicate that they are *honest* and *authentic*? Finally, how much of the motivation behind posting is due to the individual wanting to share content that is highlighted, retweeted, or liked by others in the community. Some of the findings suggest educators are challenged by aspects of communication accommodation theory (Giles & Ogay, 2007) in which they modify communication, message, and portrayal of their digital identity to accommodate or interact with others online. In other words, in social scholarship practices, much of the audience, purpose, and task may be socially constructed and influence participation. Finally, we must consider how much is the identity construction practice mediated by the individual wanting to be recognized by others.

Conclusion

Educational opportunities like the #WalkMyWorld project are important because they provide opportunities for educators and researchers to explore the intersections that exist in hybrid learning spaces. Increasingly, the lines between face-to-face and online classrooms are being blurred, and research needs to continue to examine the affordances of teaching, learning, and socializing in these interstices. This is even more complex as we consider the personal and social construction of digital identity that is occurring as educators are entering their profession in this changing landscape.

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