

HOW BLOGGING AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE TEACHING PRACTICE

**ART TEACHERS UNITE...ONLINE: HOW BLOGGING AND SOCIAL MEDIA
INFLUENCE TEACHING PRACTICE**

By

CHELSEA DELEÓN

A CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS
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Abstract

Art educators are increasingly participating in online communications with colleagues to inform and enhance our personal teaching practices through peer communication and collaboration. However, there is little research in the field of art education that describes how this interaction occurs and the potential impact of social networking on art educators' teaching practices. For this study, I documented and reflected on my own social media habits to explore how consistent sharing, communicating, and participating with online art education communities influences my approaches to teaching and learning (Luehmann, 2008). Over the course of four weeks I blogged and participated in social networks regarding art education. I found that participating in the online art education community revitalized my passion for art education, provided a place for reflection on my teaching practice, and provided a place for remote collaboration and professional learning. I found that while creating a personal online art education community requires appropriate timing, consistency, and peer participation, blogging provides a place to document and reflect on aspects of one's teaching practice for personal professional growth. While the documentation for this study is complete, it is my goal to continue to utilize blogging and my online learning community to continue to improve my

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teaching practice. The blog posts written for this ongoing project can be viewed at <https://chelseaanneart.wordpress.com>.

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Introduction

When I moved from a large high school with four other art teachers to a small elementary school in which I was the solitary art teacher I began to feel isolated. Having no other art educator with whom to communicate or regularly collaborate with made me feel panicked and stressed professionally. When I began looking online for help, I found a flourishing community of art educators that has been my source of professional and emotional support for the past year. They were excited and willing to share their professional knowledge to facilitate the success of art education.

As I began to regularly participate in the online art education community through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest, I began to wonder how exactly participating in this online community directly affects art educators. Prior to the mass utilization of the internet, visual art specialists had few opportunities for collaboration, especially if they were the only art educator in their school. Now that we can share and reflect on classroom events, struggles, and successes with other art educators online, we can seek out our own professional development and grow as part of a professional community.

Statement of the Problem

Art educators are increasingly utilizing social networking platforms to facilitate professional learning, growth, inspiration, and comradery. While there are many studies that reference how utilizing social media with our students can provide an engaging learning environment, few studies describe the effects of social media utilization by teachers. Social networking and participation in online learning communities via social media are relatively new developments. Through sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and blogs we are creating and sharing more professional information than ever before. But what are the direct

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results of participating in this growing online art education community? How does it influence how we teach and how we think about our teaching?

Purpose of the Study

Throughout this study, I explored how regularly participating in the online art education community directly influenced how I understand my teaching practice and approach to art education. I began by creating a personal blog where I wrote about topics regarding art education (<https://chelseaanneart.wordpress.com/>). After completing blog posts, I shared links on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest to facilitate the growth of my own personal art education community. By regularly participating with the online art education community, via blogging and social networking, I gained new understandings of how reflective writing and communication with like-minded peers influences my teaching practice and facilitates professional growth.

Research Questions

1. How does the use of social media and blogging influence my practice as an art educator?
2. How does social media participation and blogging impact how I think about my teaching?
3. How do art educators interact on social media to improve their teaching practice?

Rationale and Significance of the Study

This study provides an understanding of how my teaching practice is being influenced by a growing online professional community. Since educators are generally becoming more familiar with the importance of connecting remotely to colleagues through social media, it is important to understand how it influences our teaching practice. As social media first became popular, teachers were cautioned to be selective with their social media usage to protect their professional

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identities. However, is it not possible to utilize social media to connect with our peers and refine our professional identities? As social media has evolved to become an everyday activity, professionals are utilizing social networks to frequently connect to groups of peers. It is important to fill holes in research about the ways contributing to, participating in, and communicating within social media influences our teaching practice in our technologically dependent society. Social media and blogs can be used to facilitate the growth of professional communities, but we develop recommendations for the best ways to participate in these communities for them to be most effective, useful, and productive.

Assumptions

As an educator who has benefited from participating in the online art education community, I expected to find more benefits from consistently engaging in connections with my fellow art educators via social media and blogging. However, having never been a consistent content *creator* for other art educators, I expected to be challenged to think reflectively on my teaching practice and to engage more actively in conversations regarding aspects of my professional practice that I chose to share. I assumed that this would be a purely positive experience that would inspire me to enhance my own teaching practice and encourage others to consider consistently participating in the online art education community.

Limitations of the Study

This study will be oriented around my personal interactions with online art education communities via blogging and social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest. Therefore, it is important to note that the findings and understandings gained from creating content and communicating with the online art education community are unique to myself. This study did not consider the feelings and insights of other art educators and cannot be

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taken to represent the opinion of other art educators. Additionally, this study encompassed only a small portion of time that will be dedicated to a long-term commitment to blogging and social media participation that extends beyond this study. Finally, due to the timing of this study, at the end of the school year and at the beginning of the summer holiday, peer participation in social media communication may have been lower than at other times.

Literature Review

Social media is becoming increasingly important in how we communicate and share information regarding education. Teachers are benefiting from increased communication with colleagues and peers through social networking. Roland (2010) suggests that “the web has evolved into a powerful platform offering a rich array of Web-based applications that may be used for...maintaining a daily journal and forming social networks” (p. 21). The utilization of social media allows art educators to “support professional learning through the development of like-minded communities not geographically or temporally constrained” (Luehmann & Tinelli, 2008, p. 323). Social media encourages art educators to develop learning communities, seek self-directed professional development, and reflect on teaching practices easily, instantaneously, and across vast distances through the internet.

Establishing Learning Communities on Social Media

An online learning community is a group of educators with similar experiences that engage in interactions through various digitally networked social media platforms. Having an online community of educators with which art educators can communicate provides encouragement, support, professional knowledge, and a place to address professional inquiry. Roland (2010) refers to the Web as a library of information and a stage to share lessons, resources, and discussions about classroom occurrences. Art educators today are teaching and

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participating in an educational culture that Miller and Williams (2013) describe as a “borderless learning environment” (p. 47) in which technology provides such a vast wealth of information that is produced and shared on social media by fellow art educators.

While creating a social media account on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or a blog may be relatively simple, establishing a “collaborative learning environment ...to allow multiple people to talk with each other” (Overby, 2009, p. 22) with active participation requires dedication and regular participation. Active social media learning communities should be a place where mentorship and professional encouragement occurs by facilitating a discussion between “groups of like-minded professionals who share understandings, norms, and practices [to] offer the support they need” (Leuhmann, 2008, p. 295).

Online learning communities also aid art educators by “establishing expectations for practices, providing images of what is possible and desirable, and offering a first line of help and advice” (Luehmann, 2008, p. 295) from peers with similar experiences. Engaging with peers who understand the unique routines and quirks of an art classroom can provide valuable insight, support, and mentorship that would not otherwise be easily accessible for a solitary art teacher. Participating in, and seeking out professional learning communities online through social media participation allow for “a sense of belonging to the wider profession rather than one school as a workplace” (Fox & Bird, 2015, p. 664). By sharing our professional knowledge, resources, and personal thoughts in our online learning communities, art education is developing a collective voice, or hive mind, that unifies us. Luehmann and Tinelli (2008) identify encouragement and commiseration as the key social aspects of online learning communities because both the author and participants in the community can communicate problems and find solutions using the collective knowledge of the group.

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When developing or participating in an online learning community, it is important to understand the role that you are playing. A participant can serve many functions including being an active questioner, a distributor of information, or a mentor that provides advice to the struggling or novice teacher. Putting digital content like images, lesson plans, or discussions on social media for other art educators to use not only benefits the content creator by providing motivation for continued creation and reflection (Luehmann, 2008), but builds the confidence of the audience by participating as a “competent and contributing member of a...professional discourse” (Luehmann & Tinelli, 2008, p. 324).

Feeling a sense that one belongs to the art education profession rather than merely one school may assist teachers’ enthusiasm about art education by finding new professional connections, mentors, ideas, resources, and support (Fox & Bird, 2015). Delacruz (2009) states that participation in online learning communities “strengthens existing core relationships, provides a sense of community, facilitates good work, and increases social capital” (p. 14). Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, and Kyndt (2016) describe a community that facilitates belonging by:

sharing experiences [members] perceive as weaknesses without fear of being judged by other members; they appreciate alternative opinions and individual difference, accept uncertainty, conflict, and inability to reach agreements, and realize that each participant is an individual, free to think and decide as he or she sees fit. (p. 55)

As a result of a healthy and supportive online learning environment, art educators seem to be promoting professional growth in our field through participation in online learning communities developing on social media platforms.

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Self-Directed Professional Development

Ciampa and Gallagher (2015) describe blogging as a place for teachers to have the opportunity “to engage as learners, build pedagogical and content knowledge, co-construct and enact new visions of practice in a collaborative setting...where a greater understanding of meaning making can be gained” (p. 885) As the previous section described, the advent of the internet and social media has facilitated unprecedented connections between remote art educators. Our capacity for instantaneous connection has encouraged the sharing of classroom ideas, strategies, and challenges. Participating in discussions regarding the happenings in our classrooms is a way to engage in professional development (Roland, 2010) because we are collaborating with teachers with similar expertise through a rapid exchange on social media. Additionally, learning to utilize and participate with online platforms encourages art educators to “incorporate these technologies to our pedagogy and curricula increasing the relevance of the learning experiences we offer our students” (Roland, 2010, p. 23). Educators are commonly encouraged to include technology into our instruction to enhance our teaching practice and increase student engagement, but can technology and social media be utilized to take advantage of our own engagement with our profession? While we art educators are still learning how to navigate and participate in online learning communities, our students are quickly adapting to and mastering the same social networks. By utilizing social networking, ourselves, we become more familiar with how to implement these networks into our curriculum as we come to understand the capabilities and possibilities of each social platform. Therefore, we are learning not only to implement social networking strategies into our curriculum, but also how to find and connect with fellow art educators in remote locations.

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When used for professional development, sharing and participating in online social platforms benefits teachers by encouraging independent long-term professional work that encourages continued professional learning (Luehmann, 2008). Because art educators are often geographically distant from each other, professional development on shared professional goals is often nonexistent. Sharing ideas and professional knowledge on social media sites creates a climate for self-directed professional goal setting. Teachers are then encouraged to contribute information to and seek out information from like-minded peers (Luehmann, 2008). A blog is one tool teachers can use. A blog is a chronological online diary or journal that is open for anyone to read online if the writer chooses to make it publically accessible (Miller & Williams, 2013). Blogging allows educators to write about what they are achieving in their classrooms, but also to reflect on areas for growth. By encouraging reflection, blogging encourages art educators to seek out others who can help aid their professional development. Naturally, moving towards a more connected art education network, art educators can use social platforms to find colleagues and information that can help individual professional development and learning.

Schlager and Fusco (2006) argue that in our current educational climate, professional development projects typically include some type of internet-based technology that facilitates dialogue and information sharing. Art educators of all ages and demographics have just gotten exceedingly better at seeking out and self-directing professional development by sharing our knowledge with our peers online via social media or blogs and consuming information provided by our peers online. Participating in online learning communities with our peers provides a “catalyst for improved instruction and professional development” (Schlager & Fusco, 2006, p. 217). Art educators, in the group “Art Teachers” on Facebook, for example, discuss challenges like classroom management and material utilization in our curriculum and classrooms to find

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solutions to those challenges with 12,862 members. By sharing challenges and solutions we are self-directing our own professional development through an online platform that encourages a “community-based approach to professional learning” (Goodyear, Casey, & Kirk, 2014, p. 5).

Castro (2011) argues that social media derives its power for self-directed professional development from the collective participation and knowledge of the art education community. Collective knowledge that is shared and sought out on social media aids in advancing the aims of art educators and art education by facilitating our collective professional goals. Roland (2011) agrees that the success of utilizing online social platforms among art educators is due to “the willingness of so many interesting people to share resources, best practices, and strategies with each other” (p. 44). To develop individualized self-directed personal development today, an art educator can access the internet and participate in an ongoing dialogue on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, or blogs that are utilized by art teachers. However, Goodyear et al. (2014) argue that to create relevant professional development we must “support frequent, sustained, and purposeful interactions” (p. 23) that are available on social media to art educators when they decide they need to interact rather than being delayed by geography, time, or resources (Castro et al., 2011).

Reflective Learning

The utilization of most social media platforms, particularly blogs, allow users to look back on previous posts and entries in a chronological progression. Having the ability to look back on previous works gives social media participants in art education a chance to reflect on teaching methods, strategies, and content over an extended period. Overby (2009) describes blog posts as an important means of being able to “track the evolution of ideas and concepts” (p. 23) over a period because bloggers can easily look back at previous posts.

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Luehmann (2008) conducted an extensive study of the *Ms. Frizzle* science education blog that focused on the posts of a writer utilizing the online name of Ms. Frizzle. She describes how the blog allowed the teacher to “engage in deep and thoughtful arguments around the dilemmas and issues with which she was wrestling” (p. 319) and “provided a place for [her] to work out [her] ideas through reflective writing” (p. 329). Blogging and social media posts allow art educators the chance to digest and respond to situations and occurrences in our classrooms. For example, we can struggle with clean-up procedures, write about what happened and what went wrong in a lesson, consider changes, and then receive feedback from peers all in one sphere of reflection. Luehmann (2008) advocates for the reflective nature of blogs by describing Ms. Frizzle’s long-term participation on the blog that allowed her to “reflect on her experiences with the goal of improving her practice but also enabled her to generalize from these experiences to wrestle with important issues and articulate new insights and resolutions that affected her understandings, beliefs, vision, and dispositions” (p. 330). Because Luehmann (2008) only analyzed Ms. Frizzle’s blog posts rather than interviewing her directly, it is important to understand that Ms. Frizzle’s audience perceives her professional self-reflective habits as a way of improving her teaching practice.

Blogs seem to be preferred means of cataloguing and archiving professional ideas, discussions, and reflections because they are easily categorized by subject and readily available for comparison and reflection by both the author and the audience (Ciampa and Gallagher, 2015). However, most social media platforms have evolved to support similar features that allow the participant to look back through their online participation history. Review of personal social media activity not only leads to the development of the best practices in our art rooms through reflection and peer consultation, but also allows a space for educators to “express emotions,

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statements of pedagogical commitments and priorities, [and an opportunity to gather] lists of potential resources and approaches” (Luehmann & Tinelli, p. 331) that are also useful and inspirational when setting goals for professional development. Consistently reflecting on one’s teaching gives art educators a change to set goals and determine what they need to achieve to enhance their teaching practice.

Teaching is an emotionally charged profession. We interact with many individuals and attitudes each day. We need means of communicating and processing those emotions and feelings about our work to maintain enthusiasm for content and the profession. Online interaction with peers through reflective posting on social media can offer professional and emotional support to handle rigorous situations in art education. However, it is important to remember that what is posted in online networks can be seen by school communities as well as peer communities, making it necessary to maintain professionalism in online public spaces.

Summary

Participation in online learning communities promotes community involvement and a commitment and enthusiasm for the profession of art education rather than enthusiasm and commitment to a single school or classroom (Fox & Bird, 2015). Social media also allows art educators to participate in individualized self-directed professional development that can be completed by the teacher as needed by finding and consuming content created by like-minded peers that fills gaps in personal knowledge. Social media promotes professional growth in art education by providing a space for teachers to reflect on classroom successes and struggles with peer support and encouragement. These findings from previous research solidify the benefits of social media usage among teachers. For this project, I will seek to identify and understand the

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personal benefits of utilizing social media in art education by taking part in the sharing and consumption of professional knowledge, support, and inspiration online.

Research Method

This capstone project was conducted using action research. In education, action research is the study and analysis of an educator's teaching practice to continue professional learning and development (May, 1993). According to Ferrance (2000) an action research approach "can serve as a chance to really look at one's own teaching in a structured manner" (p. 15) for professional growth and development. During this project, I focused on documenting and analyzing how my participation in various online art education networks influenced my art education practice (Castro et al., 2011).

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

The project took place during the four-week period of May 24th and June 21st, 2017 in which I attempted to establish a habit of documenting, reflecting, connecting online with other art educators and sharing mutually beneficial information. My goal was to write blog posts weekly and actively search for and engage in other online art education communities. To facilitate the growth and establishment of a community surrounding my blog, I shared links to the posts on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. I also logged my social media participation each day to reflect on how active social networking influences my teaching practice, how I think about teaching in art education, and how I might utilize social media and online professional learning in the future.

Data Analysis Procedures

I gathered data from my blog, social media accounts, and research logs to understand how consistent blogging and social media usage influenced my teaching practice. I created and

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used a data checklist (see Appendix A) to ensure that I was participating consistently, a research log (see Appendix B) that described my online connections each day that lists and describes how I utilized my online participation in my teaching practice (Johnson, 2012). I estimated that forming a professional *habit* of participating in the online art education community on my blog and through social media would require approximately 4 weeks of regular posts and participation to accurately document any effects on my teaching practice. In addition to daily data collection, I developed and answered questions that facilitated personal reflections (see Appendix C) about my teaching practice prior to my study and at the conclusion in an attempt to capture my general perceptions of and attitudes towards my teaching practice and how I thought about my teaching.

Data Analysis

After collecting data, I analyzed the contents of my research log and found trends regarding the amount of online participation conducted and its influence on my teaching practice and my attitudes towards teaching (Research, n.d.). Data was analyzed by comparing two factors (1) the frequency of online participation and (2) my reflective responses in my research logs. These two things were compared to understand how frequent or infrequent online participation influences attitudes towards teaching practice and teaching. Finally, I compared my reflections from the beginning and end of my project to determine how my participation in the online art education community and its influence on my teaching practice was affected by my regular participation on my blog and social media (Dick, n.d.). At the conclusion of the project, I utilized all of my data including my blog posts, research log, social media interactions, and pre/post-reflections to provide examples of how consistently interacting with the online art education community can influence teaching practices.

Findings

My goal for this study was to document my social media participation and blogging and determine if it would affect my teaching practice and how I think about my teaching. Throughout my four-week study I found that utilizing social media and blogging allowed me to redirect negative thoughts about my teaching by allowing me to reflect on my growth and strengths as an educator, rather than lingering on areas of my teaching practice that need improvement. I also determined that, for my own teaching practice, I was able to utilize the mentor mentality of various social media groups to strengthen my teaching practice and broaden my understanding of the positive influences of art education. I also discovered that online networking has its limitations and nuances that can determine the outcome of one's social networking pursuits. The timing of social media activity can impact participation from online community members. The general membership and professional attitude of the community in which you are posting will determine what you learn from the community. But, the vast numbers of different art education social media groups available allow you to diversify your online learning community and find, or initiate, a community tailored to your specific needs as an art educator.

Redirecting Negative Thoughts Through Active Reflection

Teaching art involves a lot of planning, preparation, patience, and energy. As art educators, we are consistently adapting curriculum to our students' needs, working with colleagues and administrators, and looking for ways to better our programs all while handling the day to day stress of managing and understanding the students.

At the end of a school day we are often emotionally and mentally drained, therefore, it is not uncommon for us to sometimes feel negative about our profession. When I was beginning my study, I was finishing up the school year with an enormous art show and I was exhausted.

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When I got home from school I felt extremely critical of myself, I did not feel like an effective educator because I was so exhausted. But when I completed my first blog post that addressed all the changes I adapted to this school year, I began to feel less critical and more pride in myself as an educator.

Reflecting on my teaching practice in written form helped me remember the big picture of education and what makes our profession so important rather than focusing on all the small negative things that occur in a single school day. The day I wrote my first blog post I felt exhausted, burnt out, and unsuccessful as a teacher, but the day after I felt much differently stating in my logbook that I appreciated my growth over the year and its importance for my professional development (see Figure 1). Writing down my classroom experiences, whether or not others would read them, made me feel excited about art education and seemed to alleviate negative feelings I had about the school workload or the burnt out feeling that I commonly experience at the end of the school year.

5/24/17	Responded to comments on social media and blog. Felt actually proud of my experience this year. It being such a stressful year, it was kind of cathartic going over what I learned and why it's important for what I do. It's one of those moments where I feel like I've let go of all the negative and accepted the big picture of how much I have grown this past year professionally.
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Figure 2. Post Networking Logbook Response.

Additionally, I found that having an audience of art educators, familiar with the unique position of an art teacher in a school, made a great supportive environment that helped alleviate any feelings of isolation I had been harboring over the course of the school year. When you are the only expert in your field at your school it is quite difficult to find someone who understands the ins and outs of the art classroom. Not having to explain what I do in my classroom before describing what was going on in my classroom was one of the greatest reliefs in having an

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accessible online community of art educators. Having the ability to reflect on my teaching practice and then having the opportunity to share my experiences with other art teachers reinforced a positive attitude because it felt as if I was not alone in my professional struggles, that there were others out there, even if they were not in my school, that had had the same thoughts before and knew how to address them.

Over the course of my four-week study I began to understand that online learning communities held importance for art educators because it allows us to redirect our negative feelings about our profession into constructive thoughts led by our professional reflections. I found that whether I was blogging for an audience or for myself, I consistently felt much more positive about my teaching practice after blogging or talking with my peers on my social media accounts.

However, blogging and social media participation will have different results for each art educator depending on how they utilize social networking. I tried to blog about positive things going on in my art room and reach out for help on new ideas I was hoping to try in my art room. For example, I posted a blog about my art show this year and afterwards I focused less on how stressed and exhausted I was, but on how excited the students and parents were at being able to see all of the art work.

When I asked members of the Art Teachers Facebook Group if they had ever used interactive sketchbooks with their students (See Figure 2.), I was flooded with positive encouragement and ideas that made me more excited to continue pursuing my new idea. Among the responses were links to various resources, advice from art teachers who had done similar projects, and art educators that were following the post because they were interested in starting interactive sketchbooks with their students. Because I kept my focus on the positive aspects of

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my classroom I felt more positive about teaching after each post or comment on a social media account. Allowing me to redirect negative feelings about teaching and art education into things I was excited about doing for my students and school community.



Figure 2. Facebook post inquiring about interactive sketchbooks.

Easy and Remote Collaboration and Professional Development

Being able to connect with peers remotely is the most advantageous aspect of having access to online learning communities. Art educators can easily collaborate and discuss issues in art education through social media, blogs, direct messages, and comments. I found that Leuhmann's (2008) belief in a sense of mentorship that occurs in online learning communities is correct. However, Leuhmann (2008) failed to explain, in particular reference to online learning-communities, that because so many like-minded peers are collaborating and discussing issues in art education online we can each take on the role of mentor and mentee interchangeably. For example, I felt like I had enough knowledge to share teaching strategies, via a blog post, when switching from high school art to elementary school art, but I felt like I needed

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some advice on how to store and utilize sketchbooks in my classroom. In these instances, I served as a mentor to some art educators who were making a similar grade shift and as a mentee when I asked about sketchbook utilization.

Having the ability to serve as a mentor and a mentee is very valuable in the development and success of an online art education learning community. The collective expertise of the group serves the whole community by utilizing each teacher's particular area of strength and serves to improve everyone's weakness. Because we are often confined to our physical location for collaboration, having access to an online network of art educators from a vast variety of locations, backgrounds, and situations is extremely beneficial to our professional development. When analyzing my blog statistics, I noticed that I had views not just from the United States but from other countries. While my blog is hardly the most viewed art education blog, it proves that it is possible to reach a vast number of other educators via online networks (see Figure 3.) and facilitate collaboration across great distances.

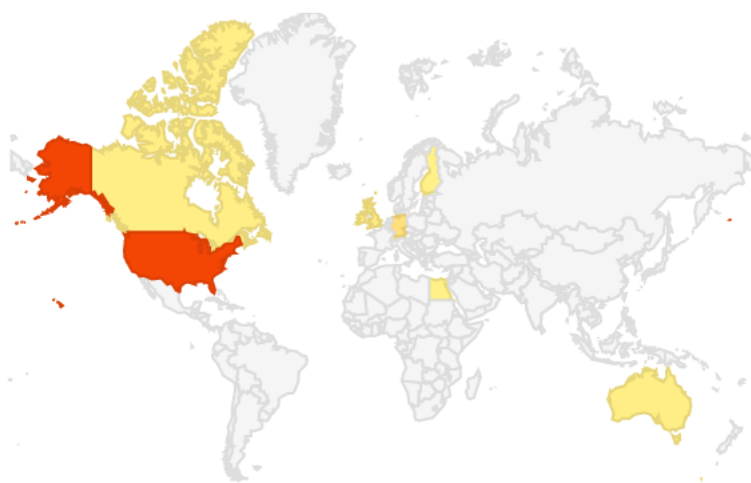


Figure 3. Map of blog viewers.

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Seeking appropriate professional development is often a struggle for art educators. Because we make up such a small percentage of a school staff, professional development is not often geared towards specific strategies that will improve our teaching practices. I found social media and blogging can empower art educators to self-direct professional learning to replace the lack of professional development provided by our schools. For example, as it was reaching the end of the school year I was beginning to run out of supplies for my students and was struggling to find an engaging project using a limited budget and free supplies. I began to look towards different online communities on YouTube, Pinterest, blogs, and Facebook until I found an idea and made it my own. For example, I found a flower assemblage project shared by an art teacher named Phyl (2012) on the blog “There’s a Dragon in my Art Room” that allowed students to paint, cut, glue, and assemble pieces all while utilizing the minimal supplies I had at my disposal. Then while looking for art education hashtags on Instagram, I came across Laura Lohmann (<https://www.instagram.com/paintedpaperart/>) who demonstrates how to teach students to paint on paper and then utilize it to make collages and assemblages. From there I combined both a project and a technique I found online to teach my students about Vincent van Gogh, sunflowers, plant growth, how to use tempera paint, how to hold a paintbrush, and how to make an assemblage. My students completed the Van Gogh-inspired sunflowers and helped assemble Van Gogh’s garden at the annual art show. Because my school system did not offer any professional development to art educators that helped them use their meager supply budget I looked to the online community of art educators to fill the gaps in my professional knowledge and utilize the materials and techniques at my disposal. Because sharing professional knowledge is such an important part of sustaining an online learning community, I shared images of my students working on their painted papers, their finished Van Gogh flowers and the finished installation

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“Van Gogh’s Garden” on Instagram, using hashtags to categorize the posts, and my blog so that my take on projects inspired by my peers could be seen by my others (See Figure 4.).

Because I was utilizing so many ideas from the online community in my classroom I felt that it was important for me to share my experiences on social media to help others looking for ideas and to show my appreciation to the art educators that were willing to share their insights (See Figure 4.). In order to keep the process of sharing professional ideas and strategies to make our classrooms successful I began to believe that it was important for me to also share how things were going in my classroom in case it would be beneficial to some other art educators in our vast online networks (see Figure 4.). Having access to a vast variety of Facebook groups, Twitter or Instagram hashtags, blogs, YouTube channels, or Pinterest boards allows art educators to see what their colleagues across the globe are doing and to self-direct their professional development by reflecting on what professional knowledge they need and seeking it out.

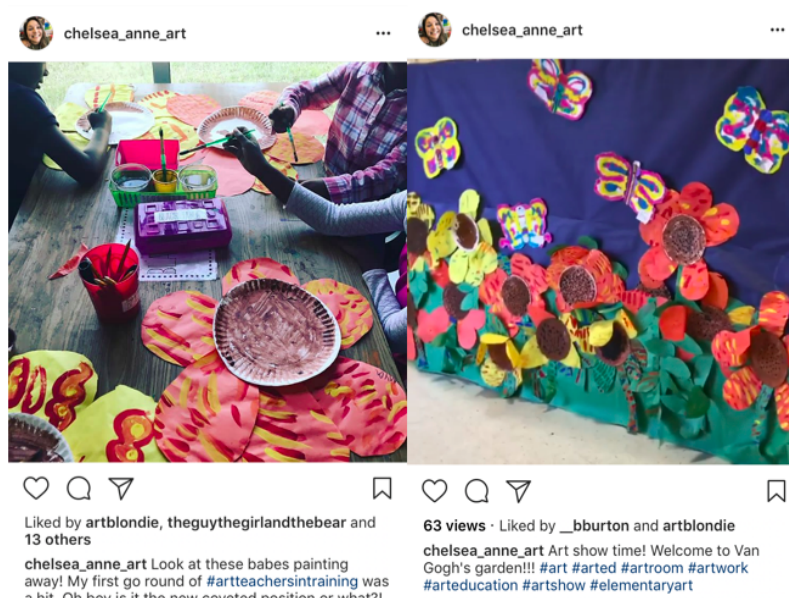


Figure 4. Sharing Van Gogh-inspired sunflowers on Instagram.

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Finding and Developing Your Own Online Community

Over the four weeks of this study, I joined a variety of online art education communities on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I found that while some art education communities are extremely active and engaging, like the “Art Teachers” Facebook group that boasts almost thirteen-thousand members, but some are either in the beginning stages of activity or have lost abundant activity over time like the Facebook group “Elementary Art Teachers (K-5th Grade)”. Therefore, while I was posting to some group pages, or tagging with certain hashtags on Instagram or Twitter I found that sometimes my posts, comments, or questions would not receive any sort of response, making it difficult to participate in any online conversation with my peers. While I still received the benefit of having a space to reflect on my teaching practice, I did not receive the benefit of having a community atmosphere in those respective groups. For example, I posted my blog links to the University of Florida Facebook group “UFARTED” in the hopes of gaining support and prompting discussions from my graduate peers, however I found that there were few Facebook “likes” and no commentary. Sharing experiences and skills is extremely important to maintaining an online learning community, but it is difficult to do so if there is not an engaged and active audience. Additionally, this study was conducted at the end of the school year and at the beginning of the summer holidays. Because of the timing in the school year, it is to be expected that active participation in these groups were probably affected by the time of year in which this study occurred.

As the study progressed and I was participating in various communities, I began to feel as if I was pestering the other art teachers with my constant conversations. Therefore, I think it is important to become a member of a variety of active art education communities to develop your own online learning community. Over the past four weeks I posted on a variety of different social

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media sites and found where I am most comfortable online based on the number of posts I created on each site (see Figure 5.). I found that Facebook Groups such as the “Art Teachers”, “High School Art Teachers”, and “Elementary Art Teachers” are by far the most responsive and hospitable groups on Facebook. Additionally, I was most comfortable posting on Facebook, and more apt to do so while I was on Facebook for personal social networking. Because my results are unique to my own social networking experience I believe that another art educator might find themselves developing a different online learning community based on their own social media preferences or physical location.

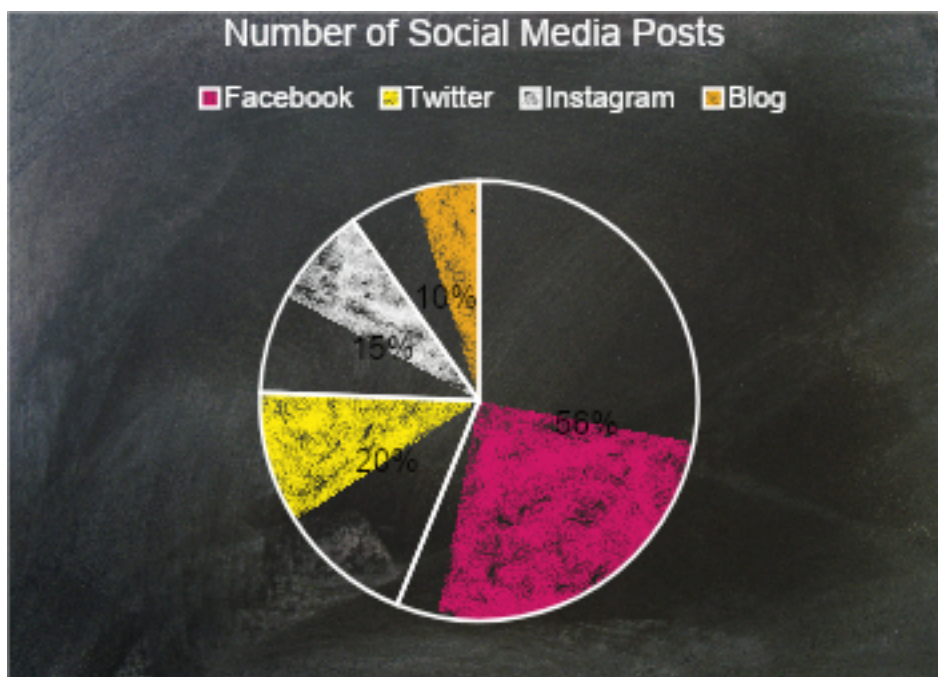


Figure 5. Pie chart of number of social media posts by platform.

Based on my study findings, I found that developing one’s own online learning community depends on a few factors including determining what social media platform you are most comfortable with, the activity level of community in which you are posting, the time of the school year, and the relevance of the information or questions you are contributing to that

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specific group. I found that the Facebook group “Art Teachers” was very beneficial when looking for advice from a variety of art educators across grade levels and a great place to experience a sense of comradery and express passion for our profession through personal-professional connections (see Figure 6). Whereas, the High School and Elementary Art groups were targeted more specifically to a grade level and towards material techniques, classroom management, and mentorship. On Twitter, I found various groups of art educators that were dedicated to art advocacy and professional development, and in contrast, on Instagram I found lighthearted and engaging photos of project ideas. Therefore, based on my findings from the past four weeks it is important to determine as an art educator what specifically you wish to learn from your learning community.

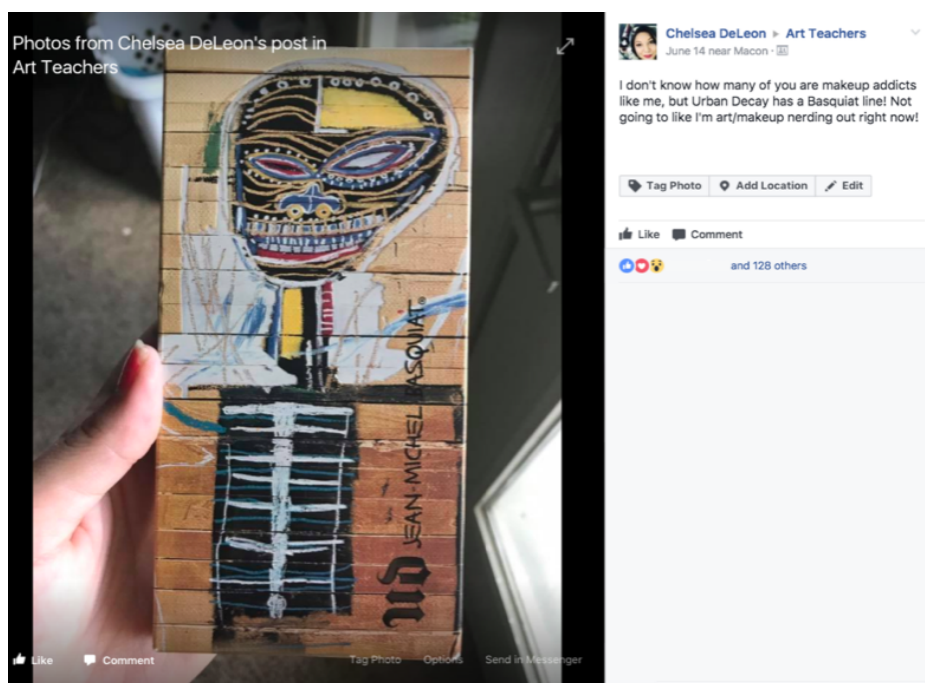


Figure 6. Example of a personal-professional connections post in the Facebook “Art Teachers” group.

Generally, utilizing Twitter was more difficult than I had assumed it would be. Twitter seems to require more of a following to engage in a conversation as opposed to Facebook, where

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I could initiate a conversation with my peers through a simple post to a group. However, I found Twitter to be an excellent catalogue of information that could be accessed by searching hashtags. Additionally, I found that searching for individuals that shared art education content and following them gave me access to more information and individuals to follow and learn from. I also found many blogs created by art teachers when other Twitter users shared my blog links. For example, I was followed by Twitter user @kimcdaniel (<https://twitter.com/kimcdaniel>) who in turn shared my blog post. When I started looking up Kim's Twitter page I found her blog that linked me to an extensive list of other art education bloggers. Kim's Twitter seems to promote engagement in the online art education community by posting relevant content, sharing posts from others, and maintaining an active blog. While I think Twitter is an excellent way to find art education communities and information regarding art education, I don't think it is the best social media platform for encouraging active discussions between peers.

Instagram in comparison to Facebook and Twitter, offers a more lighthearted approach to sharing information with the online art education community. Instagram information can be searched via hashtags. I found the hashtags "artteacherlife" and "artteachersofinstagram" to be exceptionally beneficial when looking for ideas on how to manage, decorate, or organize my classroom. Through this search I found art educators like "elementaryarts" (<https://www.instagram.com/elementaryarts/>) who is exceptional at sharing resources and classroom organizational tips. Instagram also proved helpful when searching for particular ways to direct my professional development in classroom management and material techniques. When I searched for "#paintedpaper" while working on my students' Van Gogh sunflowers I found a plethora of images and art educators that were sharing different ways to utilize painted paper in the art classroom.

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While Instagram is extremely useful in showing visual images related to your searches it is similar to Twitter in that there are few conversations being held. Twitter and Instagram seem to be extremely efficient ways of sharing information and categorizing the information with hashtags in a way that Facebook has yet to utilize. However, Facebook seems to be the best social media platform that I utilized during this study, to hold valuable conversations with peers. As art educators, we must individually determine what we need when we are finding and developing our online learning community. Is it more important to be able to hold discussions with peers, or is it perhaps more valuable to be able to access a variety of posts and information about certain subjects through hashtags? Online learning communities will vary from person to person depending on their needs, but they can be made up of a combination of different social media platforms and blogs in order to make the best learning community for each art educator.

Summary Across Findings

My findings during this study were unique to myself, and therefore It can only be concluded that each art educator that embarks on a similar process will experience something completely different in regard to where and how they develop their online learning community. I found that through online social networking with other art educators we will inevitably learn from one other when discussing various aspects of art education, but at the same time we have the opportunity to commiserate, reflect, seek encouragement, and share passions with those other individuals that understand the complexities of our profession. In this online community of art educators, no matter the social platform, we each are given the opportunity to be both a mentor to new art educators and to seek out mentors for ourselves should the need arise, and thus are allowed to actively seek our own professional development. We are also provided with a place

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for reflection beyond what we are asked to do in our professional evaluations. We can reflect on teaching practices, determine successes and failures, and then adjust our teaching practice accordingly. My study proved that online interaction between art educators can vastly influence our teaching practice as well as how we view and think about ourselves as educators.

Discussion and Conclusions

Over the course of the last four weeks I have learned a great deal about myself as an educator and as a member of the art education community. I have found that active participation in an online community of educators can drastically change the way you view and carry out your teaching practice by increasing reflective learning and providing a learning community of like-minded peers that can provide insight, collaboration, and comradery. I have learned a great deal from art educators that I may never meet in person because of online social networking. Because of this “borderless learning environment” (Miller & Williams, 2013, p.47) I was able to participate in, I observed my attitude towards my teaching change from exhausted, burnt out, and potentially looking at other careers, to excited, passionate, and proud of my teaching practice.

Having access to online learning communities for art educators is invaluable for our profession. Schools do not often cater to the arts in regard to professional development because we are members of a very small area of instruction that requires specific expertise. Therefore, we are often overlooked for professional development that relates directly to our classrooms. Having access to a “community-based approach to professional learning” (Goodyear, Casey, & Kirk, 2014, p. 5) allows us to self-direct our professional learning by utilizing the collective participation and knowledge of the art education community (Castro, 2011).

When you are an educator that is caught up in the day to day responsibilities and obligations of teaching your students it is often difficult to seriously sit down and reflect on the

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occurrences in your classroom. I found that utilizing social media, and more specifically, blogging, to take time and reflect on classroom experiences is not only beneficial to the online art education community, but is invaluable to my own teaching practice. Writing out what you would like to improve upon or do differently in the future really solidifies how you will handle situations in the future. While reading Cassie Stephens' (2014) blog post interviewing a new elementary art teacher, I began to reflect on my own feelings of exhaustion and panic that I had been feeling over the past year, and realized that feeling overwhelmed by teaching was not an uncommon occurrence and that I should not be so critical of myself, especially as a first-year elementary art teacher. Later, I found that after blogging about how I conducted our annual art show at school I was more aware of what I wanted to change for next year and I felt more organized and prepared for the changes I wished to implement. Additionally, the social aspect of online communities provides motivation for sharing and reflecting consistently which only facilitates more professional growth.

It can be deduced that online learning communities for art educators are endlessly useful for our teaching practices because we have the opportunity to learn from each other and reflect on our teaching practice. While social networking is often discussed in regard to classroom utilization and student participation, it is becoming equally important to understand how online learning communities for art educators can enhance our teaching practice.

Significance and Recommendations

As never before, art educators are connecting to each other to provide ideas, support, strategies, and encouragement to further advance the field of art education. We are utilizing amazing technology that encourages constant communication and sharing in our personal lives, and sometimes as a teaching strategy in our classrooms, but we are not addressing how these

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social networks can enhance our own teaching practice and professional development. Not long-ago art educators had to wait for magazines or art education conferences to gain pertinent professional development and learning, but no longer. It is imperative that we start to analyze how we can utilize social networks to enhance our teaching practice as well as advocate for our profession.

While researching for this study, I found little to no research on how social media influences teaching practice in art education, but infinite resources on how to utilize it with students. If it is increasingly valuable for our students, should we not be using it for our own learning? It is becoming increasingly important for me to emphasize that art educators are not alone in their profession, but are in fact part of an extensive community that can now be accessed online. If we are all participating in this online community through gaining mentorship or sharing successes we are contributing to the success and growth of our own profession and the learning of our students.

This study proves that social media usage can serve a very positive purpose in our classrooms by providing us with a community of like-minded peers that can offer support and encouragement. I found that participating with my peers online and reflecting online drastically changed my perspective on teaching and how I view myself as an educator. Further research into this topic should include more comprehensive studies involving more teachers who consistently utilize online learning communities and how it influences their teaching practice.

As I move forward professionally, I will consistently remember how much I have gained from the online art education community and will encourage myself and others to share their ideas and struggles on any online art education community. Working with our peers is an important part of our professional practice and we should therefore be encouraged to do so in

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person and online. My blog (see Figure 7) and social media practice will become part of my teaching practice in the coming years. I hope to continue to utilize it to work with a global group of colleagues and reflect on my teaching practice.

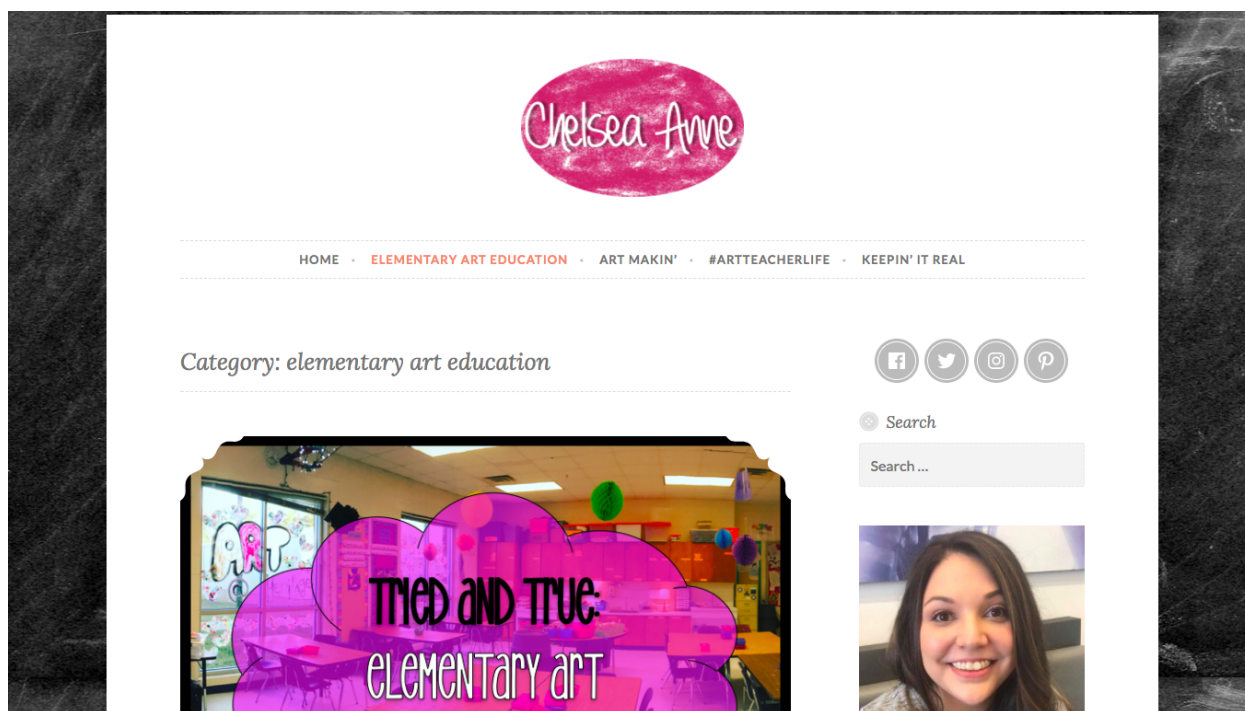


Figure 7. Chelsea Anne Art Blog – <https://chelseanneart.wordpress.com>

Conclusion

This project was motivated by my increasing utilization of the online art education learning communities that I found during my year of teaching elementary school art. Because I felt so indebted to the community of educators that supported me throughout such a challenging experience, I felt that I was obligated to contribute to this community. While this study consists of only four-weeks of reflective data, I understood when taking on this challenge that it would be the beginning of forming a habit of participating in the online art education community on my blog and through social media that I would be committed to beyond this study. The Chelsea Anne Art blog and social media accounts that I utilized during this study will continue past this

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research and will be part of a long term professional project. As a result of this study, I feel that I have developed a professional habit of participating in the online art education community. I found blogging to be a rewarding reflective process that I am excited to continue. I also found participating in art education social networks to be a successful way to gain or give mentorship, share successes, and seek insight needed for improvement.

Online learning communities are what you make of them, if you spend significant time participating and sharing with your colleagues I believe you will make serious gains as an art educator. It has been made clear to me throughout this study that utilizing online learning communities and blogging are extremely effective teaching tools that allow professional reflection, remediation, and collaboration.

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Appendices

Appendix A

 Blog Post Published  Completed Task

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Data Collection Calendar: Checklist							
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 1			☒ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook May 24	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook May 25	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook May 26	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook May 27	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook May 28
Week 2	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook May 29	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook May 30	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook May 31	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 1	☒ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 2	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 3	☒ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 4
Week 3	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 5	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 6	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 7	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 8	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 9	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 10	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 11
Week 4	☒ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 12	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 13	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 14	☒ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 15	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 16	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 17	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 18
Week 5	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 19	☐ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 20	☒ Blog post ☐ Social Media ☐ Logbook June 21				

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Appendices

Appendix B

Research Log Week: 2			
1. Prior to completing the daily research how did you feel about your art education practice today?			
Date	Log Response		
5/29/17	A little stressed. Post-Planning tomorrow. Worried about a stressful environment. Proud of myself though and very excited while designing my interactive sketchbook!		
5/30/17	Definitely feeling like a strong art educator today.		
5/31	I feel accomplished to have made so many great friends in the last year and to have given so many teachers a respect for art education because of how well my students did this year! I'll be sad to leave them, but I'm very, very ready to head on to my next position.		
6/1	First day of summer! Feeling a bit like a slacker today, going apartment hunting in Atlanta. Not much time to engage. But I think everyone needs a social media break every now and, again right? Also, I don't want to feel too overbearing as I share my posts.		
6/2	Blog post today! I've been working on this one most of the week and making sure to include pictures and videos. Since, it's the last elementary art show I'll do for a while it was good to reflect on how good of a job I did and be proud of myself not matter the work situation.		
6/3	Feeling pretty good today! Glad I posted last night! It seems we are all stressed about art shows. It makes me feel better because I feel like a crazy mess around art show time, but while reading the comments, many teachers were saying they did Artome, but I'm really glad I made our art show unique! So, I feel pretty good about my teaching practice today. I did well this year, and I hope my blog post helps some art teachers out there figure out the art show madness!		
2. Where did you participate in the online art education community today?			
Date	Log Response	Date	Log Response
5/29/17	Instagram, Facebook, #artteacherlife	6/2	Shared blog on all FB groups, IG and Twitter
5/30	Facebook-had a GREAT discussion about interactive sketchbooks	6/3	Responded to comments on all social media
5/31	Instagram, Facebook-joined two more groups	6/4	-
6/1	Facebook-shared a video in Art Teachers, but should have asked a question to get more of a conversation going.		
3. Describe how you feel about your art education practice after posting participating online or blogging?			
Date	Log Response		
5/29/17	I feel pretty great right now, it's the end of the year, and I'm so excited for a fresh start next year. I think the things I've been working on for next year are really amazing. It was nice to look around at what other art teachers are doing right now. Feeling a sense of gratitude. Don't I have a cool job? Even at the end of the day when everything is chaos, I still get to teach art!		

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Appendix B

5/30	I'm so EXCITED about these interactive sketchbooks! I feel like I've taken something I've seen this year (outside of my curriculum) and I'm adapting it to what I love!		
5/31	Glad I found some more groups to join! I'm beginning to think the more people I can interact with, help, and get ideas from will help me maintain stamina throughout the summer and school year.		
6/1	Shared a video today, I want to find a way to communicate more with my peers. A more significant conversation? But perhaps that's not the purpose.		
6/2	Whew! That blog post was a doozy! I didn't realize I had so much in my brain about art shows. It makes me kind of happy though. What we do isn't easy and it isn't always appreciated, but listing things out like that gave me a sense of validation that being an art educator is worthwhile and that my teaching practice does provide a positive experience for so many.		
6/3	Feeling very proud that my post could have given some other teachers some ideas! And some validation that what I've been doing this year (while struggling to adapt to a new grade group) was successful!		
4. Did you learn anything significant today by participating in the online art education community?			
Date	Log Response		
5/30	Sometimes it's nice to share and bounce ideas off of people who do what you do! It's an invaluable resource!		
5/31	There are tons of groups out there, some not so big, but worth joining.		
6/2	-		
5. On a scale of one to ten how would you rate your perceived blog and social media success?			
Date	Log Response	Date	Log Response
5/29	8	6/1	2
5/30	10 😊	6/2	10
5/31	4	6/3	19
6. What kinds of connections or communities did you seek out online today?			
5/31/17	Facebook: Elementary Art Teachers, K-5 Art Teachers (both very active FB groups)		
6/1/17	Attempted to share an art related video/article with my peers.		
6/2/17	Tagged other bloggers in my posts		

HOW BLOGGING AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE TEACHING PRACTICE

Appendices

Appendix C

Pre- Project Reflection	
1.	How do you think blogging and regular participation with the online art education community will/has impacted your teaching practice?
	I think Blogging and regularly participating with the art education community will provide me with a reflective space where I can hash out and reflect on my own art education practice. I think this will be an opportunity for vast growth in advocating for my program and connecting with other art educators. I also hope that this will provide motivation to give my teaching practice as much passion as I can muster. I also hope that I will find and connect with fellow art educators who have been in similar experiences as I, and others who are in vastly different circumstances to understand how art education looks to different parts of our country and the world.
2.	What are some outcomes you hope to experience from participating online? / What were the outcomes of online participation in the online art education community?
	-Professional Growth -A Space for Reflection -Broader view of Art Education -Eliminating Teacher Burn out -Peer Motivation -Accountability
3.	What is your general attitude toward art education and your teaching practice?
	Honestly, I'm tired and burnt out this year. It's been difficult to advocate for my program in a school system with no appreciation for the arts other than to provide planning periods to classroom teachers. Consistently stressing about budgets, CCRPI, student misbehavior, too many tasks to accomplish outside of my responsibilities as an art educator, and stress from administration has made it difficult to love my profession this year. I've sensed a growing dread of going to work and I miss feeling like I'm excited to go to work because I actually have the best job in the whole world. I hope that participating in my own online art ed community will help me realize that I get to go to school, spend time with wonderful children, and do what I love all day.
4.	What specific goals do you have for your blog before and after the project?
	Right now, I hope to just develop a habit of posting and sharing what's going on in my art education practice. After the project, I hope to continue blogging as a way of connecting with other art educators and documenting what's happening in my classroom so that I can look back and see my own growth.
5.	How does contributing to the online art education community beneficial to art education?
	I think art education is in a pivotal stage of development due to increased peer connection via the internet and social media. We have access to so much knowledge and it's time to decide how that's going to influence our teaching practice. By discovering how we connect to each other we can determine how best to utilize our online connections to benefit our teaching practices and the field of art education.

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Author Biography

Chelsea DeLeón is the first person in her family to attend and graduate from a college or university. Because she always had a passion for both teaching and art making, Chelsea graduated from the University of Georgia with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art Education in May 2012. She began her teaching career in the fall of 2012 and has since instructed both high school and elementary art education. She began pursuing her Master of Arts in Art Education in May 2015 at the University of Florida.

Chelsea strives to give her students a firm appreciation of art, art making, and art history that students can find in their own environments. While Chelsea considers herself a young educator with much to learn, she enjoys her career and believes that art education is the best way in which she can serve her students and community.

When Chelsea is not teaching, she spends her time painting and making ceramic art that is thematically based on her personal history and experiences. Chelsea currently teaches in Atlanta, Georgia.