

Virtually Connecting Across Geographical Boundaries through Facebook

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This article reviews using closed group Facebook pages as a social network to create a pedagogical space where counseling students communicate, share resources, and develop cultural sensitivity. The Facebook pages were incorporated into the counseling core course (16 weeks) and the class consisted of four phases: (1) preparation and development of rapport; (2) sharing resources and reviewing key concepts; (3) increasing self-awareness and developing reflective skills; and (4) interfacing of two cultures crossing geographical boundaries. The main goals of the authors were to examine the possibility to build a virtual community through the closed group Facebook pages to interact with counseling students and educators across geographical boundaries and to open an avenue to discuss the important ethical and cross-cultural considerations when Facebook is applied in counselor education.

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Technology has transformed the way we communicate and relate to one another. Social networking tools have become a part of social life for many counselor educators and students. There are an increasing number of counselor educators using social networking tools to assist students' learning and professional development. In the field of Counselor Education, various computer-assisted instruction methods such as interactive computer simulation, computer-assisted supervision, web-based distance learning, and video conferencing have been widely used (Hayes, 2008). Incorporation of technology into counselor training curriculum enhances acquisition of core counseling concepts and knowledge, development of counseling practice skills, and improvement of cultural sensitivity. The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Technical Competencies for Counseling Education recommended counselor educators identify campus resources so that various technology applications can be integrated into counselor education, practice, and research (ACES, 2007). On the other hand, the

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effectiveness of using social media and the potential for its educational impact have been slowly recognized by counselor educators. In 2011 at the American Counseling Association (ACA) conference in Los Angeles, one of the keynote speakers presented, "Counseling in the Social Media Age: Swimming with the Current and Against" (Windham, 2011). Throughout the conference, social media and their educational and practical implications in counselor education were heatedly discussed.

Twitter, LinkedIn, Skype, and Blackboard are well known social media tools in counselor education. Jacobsen and Forste (2011) discovered that students were able to not only socialize with current friends, but to widen their social circle and actually establish new friendships via basic social networking sites. Veletsianos (2012) examined Twitter and its uses among scholars and educators. Scholars not only shared information with students but also interacted with other scholars and professionals to develop a network and increase their participation in social media other than Twitter (Veletsianos, 2012).

Despite the many social networking tools and their benefits, there were reasons why each one was excluded for this current article. Skype was not used due to the significant time difference (14 hours) between the Eastern Time zone in the United States and South Korea, which would hinder cohesive communication. Twitter was not utilized because of its lack of privacy settings and the inability to maintain a continuous group conversation stream. Additionally, Blackboard was not implemented because it limits membership to only students enrolled in campus classes. South Korean students would be unable to log in and participate if Blackboard was used. Finally, LinkedIn was not considered due to the fact that its main use is for professional networking rather than education.

This article mainly explored an opportunity to integrate Facebook to virtually connect with students and educators in counselor education across geographical boundaries, specifically between South Korea and the United States. A closed group Facebook page was used to facilitate discussions outside of class. Facebook was chosen because it was a common social media tool that all students in class had access to and were familiar with the various functions of the applications. Closed group Facebook pages provided better privacy and allowed the educator to create a virtual community atmosphere.

Facebook in Counselor Education

Facebook is one of the most widely used social networking tools among college students. It provides various functions, including synchronized and asynchronous chats, picture uploading, news feeds, blogs, Facebook groups, individual and group messaging, emails, networking through various levels of friendship, affiliations, locations, and preferred organizations. Facebook enables its users to witness how fast information can be distributed and how they can be connected with one another via a simple click. Jenness (2011) asserted that by allowing students to connect with their classmates via Facebook, educators were able to increase academic assistance resources available to students and enhance their feelings of comfort toward their educational institution. Considering it is a 'known entity' for most students in their networking (Walsh, 2009), counselor educators

could save tremendous training time by incorporating this technology into their teaching. Moreover, Facebook places an emphasis on cyber relationships. Counselor educators can integrate students' existing networking skills and encourage students to practice key counseling skills and build meaningful relationships.

Facebook was examined from many different perspectives in literature. Studies focus on educational impacts on learning through Facebook (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007), connection strategies of Facebook users (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011), and the pedagogical approach of closed group Facebook pages (Reid, 2011). The use of Facebook also had a significant impact upon the theoretical orientation of counselor education, including learning processes and personal relationships with students. Milliron and Miles (2000) noted that by allowing students to use threaded discussions, email, chat rooms, and newsgroups, Facebook has the ability to offer students a variety of new ways to participate in the learning process. Selwyn (2009) discussed that Facebook enhanced collaborative learning by reflecting each other's participation and mirroring exemplary learning processes.

It is vital that counselor educators maintain a strong relationship with their students in order to effectively teach and implement required skills and techniques. Junco and Cole-Avent (2008) agreed that one of the factors to consider when integrating technology was to communicate with students about how they currently utilized technology and how they would prefer their educational institutions to interact with them through technology. Counselor educators could utilize surveys and student questionnaires to gain feedback directly from students and integrate their preferred technology into teaching.

In particular, the closed group Facebook pages had strengths that enhanced educational use in teaching. Reid (2011) stated that the nature of these pages were more private for academic uses such as communicating, building relationships, and sharing experiences with classmates. As a matter of fact, confidentiality and boundaries are critical ethical issues in counselor education. Using the closed group Facebook pages can be the way for counselor educators to increase students' involvement in learning, provide opportunities to develop relationship-building skills virtually, and facilitate counseling-related resource sharing. Yan (2008) observed that students who shied away from participating in class were able to use these new ways of communication to become more actively involved in an online classroom; the virtual environment helped both students and educators become empowered.

Enhancing Multicultural Competencies

Counselor educators need to use various forms of technology to approach, "issues of multiculturalism, diversity, and contemporary ethical standards of practice" (ACES, 2007). Milliron and Miles (2000) contended that Internet technology could be used by nearly every discipline to build upon its curriculum content, make subjects more relatable, and help students see the discipline application and usefulness in real life situations. However, the competencies did not specify knowledge or skills about how social networking can be applied in research, teaching, or practice. Wendler and Struthers (2002) discussed that

students learned culturally sensitive ways to show respect and care for diverse populations through implementation of an asynchronous course. Moreover, students exhibited increased application skills in communication for both online and face-to-face encounters. McCarthy (2010) asserted that social media encouraged international students to develop a sense of belonging in their foreign academic environments, especially when developing cross-cultural relationships.

The main goals of the authors were to examine the possibility of building a virtual community through a closed group Facebook page to interact with counseling students and counselor educators across geographical boundaries and to create an avenue to discuss the important ethical and cross-cultural considerations when Facebook is applied in counselor education.

Synopsis of the Course

In 2012, master's level counseling students at a mid-size university in the United States were invited to a closed group Facebook page. The majority of the students were Caucasian American specializing in the student affairs and college counseling track. This Facebook group was purposefully incorporated into the Counseling course (COUN 7023 Lifespan and College Student Development) for three reasons. First, the closed group Facebook page was used to build supportive and instructional relationships with students. Secondly, the closed group Facebook page was used to encourage students to share their ideas and resources with one another outside of class. Thirdly, the closed group Facebook page was used as a communication tool to interact with counseling students and counselor educators crossing geographical boundaries.

Table 1 Course Objectives

COUN 7023 Lifespan and College Student Development

The purpose of this course is to provide the graduate student with an introduction to the field of college student and human development across the lifespan. Students will be exposed to a range of human development theories and student characteristics that offer insight into the processes of student learning, growth, and development. Special focus will be directed toward understanding patterns of growth and change during the college years for diverse student subgroups and the implications of these changes for the practices of student affairs and college counseling.

Joining the closed group Facebook page was voluntary. There was no incentive given to the participants. Of the 27 students enrolled in the course, 25 students joined the group. Before the start of the semester, the educator pre-planned the course with a counselor educator in South Korea and designed the closed group Facebook page to communicate online cultural exchanges between the students in the United States and South Korea for four weeks toward the end of the semester. The Korean students were both undergraduate and graduate levels and all of them were enrolled in a Multicultural

Counseling class at a women's college in Seoul, South Korea. English was used as the main language for the online communication. A few Korean students had difficulties with communicating in English since their official language was Korean in their class. Some of the American students used the Korean translation function on Facebook to encourage those Korean students to feel comfortable communicating with them

The class consisted of four phases: (1) preparing and developing rapport; (2) sharing resources and reviewing key concepts; (3) increasing self-awareness and developing reflective skills; and (4) interfacing of two cultures crossing geographical boundaries.

Phase 1: Preparation and Development of Rapport

During week 1 and 2, the educator informed students how Facebook would be incorporated into the course. The educator assisted the students in becoming acclimated to the closed group Facebook page. The students named the Facebook page as PenguinTALK. Students believed it was a symbol of their class group identity. The educator also facilitated developing a level of trust and comfort when communicating through the page. A welcome message and short introduction of the group was communicated through the page. The educator explained that weekly questions, key concepts, and interesting topics would be posted on the page and encouraged the students to share any effective, instructional, and creative ways to use the Facebook page. The educator shared a brief introduction about herself at first, as to help the students feel more comfortable when sharing about themselves.

It is highly recommended that an educator create a new Facebook account for the class separate from personal accounts so that the professional boundary and privacy of the educator can be protected. Moreover, it might be helpful to let students know that Facebook group members do not need to "friend" one another. Without, "friend" status, anyone who has a Facebook account can create and join a closed group Facebook page. One of the strengths of using the closed group page is that it allows the contents to be viewed and written amongst group members despite privacy settings (i.e., secret, closed, and open). Moreover, ground rules needed to be established at this phase. The educator used the time as an opportunity to discuss the core rules of "netiquette" (e.g., confidentiality, other ethical issues, etc.).

Table 2 Phase 1

Session	Facebook Discussion
Week 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The purpose(s), as well as potential benefits and considerations of using Facebook were discussed. 2) Students were informed the core rules of “netiquette” (e.g., confidentiality, other ethical issues, etc.). 3) Students discussed the name of the Facebook group, logo, and level of privacy. 4) The class brainstormed various ways to utilize the Facebook group each week and throughout the semester. <p>The educator created a Facebook group. These steps were followed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Log in to Facebook. 2) Click on the “Home” tab, located at the top right hand corner of your page. 3) On the left hand side of the page, look for the “GROUPS” area. Click on the “Create Group...” option. 4) A pop-up box appears, and then fill in the textbox, “Group Names.” 5) In the textbox near the “Members,” type your students’ names (in order to create a group, you have to add at least one member). 6) Near the “Privacy” label, choose one of three options (Open, Closed, or Secret). 7) Click on the “Create” button on the bottom of the pop-up box.
Week 2	<p>The educator informed the students about the Facebook group and encouraged the students to join the group:</p> <p><i>Welcome to PenguinTALK! Dr. C will post one question each week. The group members are strongly encouraged to share their thoughts, ideas, reactions, insights, and resources with one another! Please be respectful of others.</i></p> <p><i>[Post 1] Hi! Everyone. Please share one thing about yourself that only your best friends know.</i></p>

Phase 2: Sharing Resources and Reviewing Key Concepts

From weeks 3 through 9, the educator intended to reinforce key concepts reviewed in class and encouraged the students to research various resources related to the key concepts. Various types of resources, such as YouTube videos, web pages, pictures, and movie clips, can easily be linked and shared through the Facebook group page. These additional resources could reinforce the student learning process, facilitate student self-

directed learning, and make meaningful connections between classroom materials and other resources in their daily lives. Moreover, during week 5, professional development opportunities (e.g., “Play Therapy 2012 Spring Conference” or “Depression/Suicide speaker to appear on campus”) were shared.

During these weeks, the students were encouraged to discuss class assignments, share ideas, and exchange constructive feedback on the Facebook group page. Not only the outcomes, but also the process of learning was facilitated through online discussion.

Table 3 Phase 2

Week 3	<i>[Post 2] I've introduced sandtray (or play therapy) in today's class. I would like you to share any creative or effective ways to work with children or adolescents via YouTube videos, webpages, pictures, or movie clips, etc. There will be a prize to the individual with the best idea.</i>
Week 4	<p>The educator encouraged the students to share resources and provided an opportunity to reflect on their own attitudes, beliefs, and changes.</p> <p><i>[Post 3] I shared one of my favorite books, <u>Tuesdays With Morrie</u>, in class. I just found out that there is a movie based on this book; however, I strongly recommend you to read the book :) Please share your favorite book that has made you think of your own life and changed your attitude toward life.</i></p>
Week 5	<p>The educator attempted to make a connection between class materials and weekly special events or occasions. Sharing one's own personal experience facilitated the development of meaningful relationships among the group members.</p> <p><i>[Post 4] Hello! Everyone. Valentine's day is coming. What was the best valentine's gift or story during your college years? Please share any interesting stories or fun facts related to Valentine's day.</i></p>
Week 6	<p>The educator helped the students think of ways to increase student's involvement in the group discussion and ways to apply Facebook into their counseling areas of interests.</p> <p><i>[Post 5] We have discussed college student development and various theories. As we discussed, student involvement in college positively affects student learning and development (Astin, 1993). I would like to ask you to share any ideas, examples, and recommendations in using Facebook to increase student involvement. What motivates you to leave a comment on Facebook?</i></p>

Week 7 The educator facilitated a discussion on each student's assignment and shares insights and observations with other classmates.

[Post 6] You have been working hard on your observation paper. Why don't you share one thing that you found the most interesting?

Week 8 The educator used the Facebook group to emphasize key concepts and facilitated in-depth discussion about any reactions and thoughts among the group members.

[Post 7] I think student D already started this week's Facebook conversation! Thank you! Why don't we share our reactions, resources, and thoughts about racial and ethnic development theories this week?

Week 9 Before submitting an assignment, the educator encouraged the students to share their ideas and exchange constructive feedback or suggestions with each other.

[Post 8] I hope that you are enjoying the spring break! Some of you have already started writing your second observation paper. Why don't you share your observation site/event and things that you found interesting? I encourage you to get constructive feedback from one another before submitting your paper to me. It always helps to have a second set of eyes.

Phase 3: Increasing Self-Awareness and Developing Reflection Skills

Based on perceived trustworthy relationships among the students in the closed group Facebook page by the educator, the students started to share in-depth personal experiences, insights, and reflections during week 10 through week 12. The shift of the focus from objective information (key topics, resources, and assignment) to subjective experiences (personal stories, assumptions, attitudes) happened effortlessly due to the openness, respect, and support among the Facebook group members. The students posted very personal memories and experiences, and other classmates provided lots of supportive comments on each post. It seemed that the student self-disclosures and online interactions were very similar to the group counseling process at a working stage.

Table 4 Phase 3

Week 10	<p>The educator helped the students to reflect their personal experiences and apply those experiences in theories.</p> <p><i>[Post 9] We will discuss career development/theories this week. Who or what was the biggest influence on your career decision? And why?</i></p>
Week 11	<p>Based on the perceived trustworthy relationship developed in the Facebook group by the educator, students were asked to share in-depth stories and experiences with the group. The educator expected to see a therapeutic process through group support, encouragement, and understanding among the group members.</p> <p><i>[Post 10] All of us experienced some very painful relationships, events, or circumstances in the past. These could really crush our self-esteem and block our ability to grow and live life fully. On the other hand, these hardships and crises could motivate us to look into ourselves, understand others, and think about the meaning of life. Please share one hardship or crisis that has had a major impact on your life personally or professionally. What was the nature of the hardship or crisis? What had helped you to overcome and deal with it?</i></p>
Week 12	<p>The educator facilitated the students to examine their own assumptions, feelings, and attitudes on the class topic and develop self-awareness.</p> <p><i>[Post 11] We will discuss Middle and Elder Adulthood this week. I'd like to ask you to share your assumptions, ideas, expectations, experiences, fears, and attitudes about "being old " or "getting older."</i></p>

Phase 4: Interfacing of Counseling Students and Counselor Educators Crossing Geographical Boundaries

During the last four weeks (weeks 13 through 16), the counseling students and educators in both the United States and South Korea had cross-cultural discussions online. It was crucial that the educator created a warm and welcoming atmosphere for new members from another culture.

In order to invite students from another country, the Facebook page privacy level needed to be re-adjusted; the level was changed from "Closed" to "Open" until new members joined, and then changed to "Closed" again. The educator needed to inform the students about this change in advance. During the cross-cultural exchanges, language barriers needed to be addressed sensitively. The Facebook translation function was

sometimes used; however, there was a possibility that this function could create more confusion due to the level of accuracy. Overall, the educator kept encouraging both South Korean and U. S. students to stay connected through the Facebook group page.

Table 5 Phase 4

Week 13 & 14	<p>The American students asked questions regarding any differences and similarities of two cultures between U.S. and South Korea.</p> <p><i>[Post 12] For U.S. students: I'd like to ask you to post a question related to multicultural issues and topics (e.g., differences or similarities between South Korea and U.S., South Korean culture, college life, education, counseling program, etc.).</i></p> <p><i>For South Korean students: Please read the U.S. students' questions and share your thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Thank You!</i></p>
Week 15 & 16	<p>During weeks 15 and 16, the South Korean students asked questions regarding any differences and similarities of two cultures between U.S. and South Korea.</p> <p><i>[Post 13] Welcome! We have had about 6 new members joining the PeguineTALK. In the following week, we would like to hear from South Korean students, please feel free to post any questions that you'd like to ask to U.S. students. Also, let's use this place to share any useful and relevant resources via YouTube videos, website links, pictures, music, movies, poems, books with one another.</i></p> <p>By the end of Week 16, the educator reminded both cultural groups of the end of the cultural exchange on Facebook. The educator helped the students to prepare for the termination.</p> <p><i>Reminder: Hello! Just wanted to remind you that this FB group [PeguineTALK] will be closed in 24 hours. Don't miss out on this great opportunity to share your understanding or misunderstanding about culture. Your thoughtful comments and interesting questions are much appreciated!"</i></p>

Discussion

A closed group Facebook page [*PeguineTALK*] was designed to give students the opportunity to interact with counseling students and counselor educators from different cultures. The purpose of the discussions and resources was to increase awareness of students' own cultural identity and to broaden students' knowledge on multiculturalism. Despite the anticipated challenges and barriers, such as languages, time difference, or

communication styles, the students were actively engaged in cross-cultural exchanges. Therefore, a closed group Facebook page was proven to be an effective and innovative tool for counselor educators to facilitate the development of counseling students' multicultural competencies. After the semester, class evaluations were administered. Overall, the students who participated in the closed group Facebook page reflected the course in a favorable way.

Considering Ethical Issues

The 2005 ACA Code of Ethics included Standard A.12: Technology Applications. Ethical guidelines, such as benefits and limitations, technology and informed consent, confidentiality, and laws and statutes, are outlined. Appropriate use of computer-mediated technology and integration of technology into curriculum were recognized as the necessary way to equip counseling students for 21st century counseling practice.

Although ethical issues have been one of the most emphasized topics in the field of counselor education, ideas of confidentiality and professional boundary have not yet been specified for online interactions. Internet social media sites have been enveloped by a web of controversial issues, including the user's safety, privacy, and attitudes when it comes to revealing personal information to the entire world (Cain, 2008). It would be beneficial to examine confidentiality, boundary, and power issues in online spaces and compare it with traditional counseling settings. For example, Facebook allows many people to track users' every move and this application has the potential to put those users in harm's way. There is a greater potential for cyber bullying due to the anonymity of cyber space. Furthermore, users should keep up to date with changes made to their account settings, functions, and privacy policy. Users must be made aware that privacy settings need to be changed in order to avoid third party access to their information. In teaching, students should be advised of what content is appropriate and ethical for their Facebook pages. In addition, educators need to be aware of their students' comfort level with online interactions as well as their participation and engagement through social media.

A study (Friedman, Kahn, Peter, Hagman, Severson, & Gill, 2006) examined how people may perceive personal privacy in a non-technological arena. In this same study, all of the participants agreed that reading one's personal diary was an invasion of privacy, yet around 25 percent thought that live image video of someone in a public space is a violation of privacy. In training ethical issues, Foulger and her colleagues (Foulger, Ewbank, Kay, Popp, & Carter, 2009) suggested that cases containing ethical issues in social networking would enhance the understanding of the complex nature of ethical dilemmas. They asserted that this approach has the potential to increase students' recognition and integration of multiple perspectives about advantages and disadvantages of using social networking tools in teaching and enhance students' appreciation for the range of ethical vulnerabilities inherent in social networking media. Through this approach, counselor educators might be more proactive in preventing students from potential ethical violations by presenting and discussing potential ethical violations in the use of technology.

Hayes (2008) suggested that counselor educators should consult their professional associations' codes of ethics and openly discuss ethical issues ranging from confidentiality

to informed consent with students. These professional associations include the American Counseling Association (ACA), the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), and Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES). The National Board for Certified Counselors (2012) indicated in their Practice of Internet Counseling Guidelines that one must review their ethical codes frequently in order to stay apprised of the many emerging technologies.

Despite the numerous codes and rules governed by state and national associations, there is very little light shed specifically onto social networking tools in the field of counselor education. The ACA Code of Ethics 2005 did not address social media or networking. The ACES's Best Practices in Supervision, Standards for Counseling Supervisees, Curriculum Guide, and Ethical Standards for Supervisors failed to include any language or information in regards to social media, social networking, or Facebook specifically. However, the NBCC does address social media in 19, 20, and 21 of their Directives section.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As stated by Howard Rheingold about the benefits of social media to students, there was, "Greater engagement, greater interest, students taking more control and responsibility for their education (Blankenship, 2011)." Social media is an effective way to facilitate students to get involved in their learning, enjoy the learning process, and become self-motivated learners. Research studies have shown that through the use of Facebook, students are able to gain more fulfillment and motivation within their classes and build a relationship with the faculty (Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, & Liu, 2012). This article demonstrated a way to incorporate a closed group Facebook page in the counseling course to connect with students outside of class and across geographical boundaries. The closed group Facebook page [PeguinTALK] helped facilitate students to stay connected with key concepts and counseling related resources. Through this virtual community, students were able to interact with counseling students and counselor educators in different countries and to develop cross cultural sensitivity and relationships.

Social networking technologies and their applications have become an inevitable part in the field of counseling. They will enable the counselor educators and students to teach and learn counseling effectively. However, it is reality that there is still a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done in terms of development of clearer ethical guidelines and proper training about professionalism and ethical issues for counselor educators and students. The more social media and social networking tools are used, the more ethical considerations will arise. In addition, it is imperative that more national and statewide organizations begin to address social networking in their codes, ethics and regulations. The authors hope that this article leaves the door open for further research and discussion into how Facebook and other social networking tools may be used in counselor education.

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