

# Perceived adequate education in ethics: A way to tap into ethical Social Networking Sites awareness?

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## Abstract

Teachers are role models when it comes to ethics both on- and offline. Teacher education aims to prepare preservice teachers for future on- and offline situations and issues that may be of ethical concern. Education in ethics is one way to work with awareness about ethics in Social Networking Sites (SNS) across different forms of social media. This study first investigates preservice teachers' perceived adequacy of ethics education. Second, it investigates how perceived usefulness of ethics education relates to how aware preservice teachers' report to be regarding own and others' negative SNS experiences. The results show that preservice teachers perceive that education in ethics differs depending on how well it has prepared them for dealing with ethical issues in the teaching profession. Preservice teachers who felt that ethics education had prepared them well for ethical challenges as professional teachers, reported more awareness (conscious competence, known area) of personal negative SNS content than preservice teachers who reported

Perceived adequate education in ethics: A way to tap into ethical Social Networking Sites awareness? education in ethics to be less useful. Ethics education that preservice teachers perceive to be useful is one way to connect to preservice teachers' own negative SNS experiences. Connecting to how preservice teachers recognise and detect own negative SNS experiences can prepare preservice teachers for future ethical situations and issues as professional teachers.

**Keywords:** teacher, education, social media, ethics, competence, awareness

## Introduction

Professional teachers are role models for prospective students in the application of information and communication technologies (ICT) as well as in use of social media (SNS) in an ethical manner. According to Shapiro & Stefkovich, (2011) different surrounding arenas contribute to influence ethical consciousness and behaviour. Teacher education may be one of these arenas. Teacher education aims to prepare preservice teachers for future on- and offline situations and issues that may be of ethical concern. As such, teacher education is a fruitful venue to bring personalized experiences in general, and address SNS related ethical challenges and dilemmas specifically for prospective teachers. Education in ethics is one way to work with ethical SNS awareness. This study investigates (1) preservice teachers' perceived adequacy of ethics education, and second (2) how perceived usefulness of ethics education relates to how aware preservice teachers' report to be regarding own and others negative SNS experiences.

## Ethics and teacher education

According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011), ethics education for preservice teachers is one way to secure the "Best interest of the student". In their model of "the ethics of the profession", they argue that the major factors that converge to create the professional surroundings of teaching are (1) the personal codes of ethics, (2) the individual professional code, (3) the standards of the profession, (4) the professional code of ethics, and (5) the ethics of the community. Shapiro and Stefkovich argue that a professional code cannot be separated from a person's personal code of ethics, and that ethical choice and reasoning is related to how it is understood in the surrounding community of an individual or profession. Education in ethics may thus be of importance for preservice teachers' ethical SNS awareness (Alakurt et al., 2012).

In this study, the issue of concern is the personal codes of ethics. Ethical codes are based on people's life stories and critical incidents. The development of professional code, that is, what is perceived as good or bad, and right or wrong, and how and why professional teachers behave as they do, is closely linked to personal codes. The factors surrounding prospective teachers in relation to ethics are the impact of personal norms, the specific

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Levinas (1979) is concerned with the ethical responsibility we have as human beings when we meet other people. Teachers are role models through their way of acting (Colnerud, 2006a, 2006b), and it is vital that teachers support their pupils in acting legally, ethically and responsible online (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). According to Fox and Bird (2015), teachers need education as well as reassurance on the impacts of SNS's in their professional role. One way to prepare preservice teachers for future on- and offline situations and issues that may be of ethical concern is through ethics education in teacher education.

## **Personal to professional ethics on- and offline**

According to Foulger and colleagues (2009, p. 13), the muddiness of SNS's "might represent an ethical vulnerability in the professional use of social networking tools and deserves more concentrated study". Previous studies that have addressed the issue of SNS and teaching have on one hand argued that teachers should be cautious with their use of for instance Facebook (FB) as an informal channel (Selwyn, 2010). On the other hand, others have found that pupils are more motivated when teachers present information about themselves through SNS's such as FB (Mazer et al., 2007).

The development of a professional teacher identity related to SNS behaviour includes ethical evaluations (Morris, 2010, July; Morris et al., 2012) and knowledge about the world their pupils live in (Ziehe, 2001). The pupils who prospective teachers meet as professional teachers experience negative online experiences such as exposure to online sexual content, aggressive and/or inappropriate content or contacts; online harassment and bullying; hacking; sharing personal information. They also experience damage to reputation. viruses, spam, pop-ups and online advertisements (Smahel et al., 2020).

Teacher educators may support preservice teachers in meeting future pupils by providing possibilities to become aware of how he or she is present in their students' lives, online as well as in psychical meetings. This may be done through supporting preservice teachers to reflect upon their personal attitudes in SNS's. Thus, making possibilities for preservice teachers' reflection concerning ethics on SNS's is one way to teach them how to, in next turn, to teach their own pupils how to act legally, ethically, and responsibly online.

The rationale behind approaching ethical SNS awareness through personal experiences is the conscious competence theory (Miller et al., 2011). The origin of the theory has been

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Gaining more access to what is hidden in yourself, is also a core issue of Johari’s window (Luft, 1969). Johari’s window is illustrated as a quadrant with four areas of importance for the development of self-awareness and personal development. The first area is called open and portrays what is known by the person about him/herself and is also known by others. The blind spot (2<sup>nd</sup> area) illustrates what is unknown by the person about him/herself but others know. The third area (hidden) concerns what the person knows about him/herself that others do not. The last area (unknown) signifies what is unidentified by the person and others about him/herself.

Growing up with SNS’s, preservice teachers may have developed their personal SNS use without reflecting on how personal usage may differ from SNS use in their future role as professional teachers (see e.g., Helleve et al., 2020). Entering teacher education, novice teachers tend to copy the teachers they have experienced as good teachers (Loughran, 2006). According to Loughran, it is necessary for preservice teachers to become conscious of previous experiences, in order to find their own way as teachers. Concerning digital media and SNS’s, preservice teachers may have personal experiences to draw on, but not necessarily teachers as role models from their own schooldays.

Previous studies suggest that reflection on cases (Helleve, Almås & Bjørkelo, 2020; Helleve, Eide & Ulvik, 2021), including ethical issues, is regarded as a useful way to gain a self-understanding as professional, digital competent teachers, and that teacher education should create possibilities for reflection based on personal experiences and cases including ethical issues connected to SNS (Helleve et al., 2020). In line with this, we argue that discussions concerning personal experiences of on- and offline situations and issues that may be of ethical concern may be one way to prepare preservice teachers for the future through the possibility of illuminating more of areas of themselves. Depending on the perceived adequacy of ethics education, preservice teachers may potentially get in touch with more of their personal experiences. Connecting their professional development to their own personal experiences may make preservice teachers more prone to develop the

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## **Aim of study**

Teacher education aims to prepare preservice teachers for future on- and offline situations, and issues that may be of ethical concern. One way to work with ethical SNS awareness is through education in ethics. Perceived usefulness of education in ethics may again be related to more conscious competence, if preservice teachers are able to connect to their own experiences. Based on the models of the relationship between teaching as a profession and ethics, we assume that one way to get access to preservice teachers’ ethical SNS awareness is through adequate education in ethics during teacher education. In this study we therefore first investigate preservice teachers’ perceived adequacy of ethics education, and second, how perceived usefulness of ethics education relates to how aware preservice teachers’ report to be regarding own and others negative SNS experiences.

## **Method**

### **Procedure**

Data from preservice teachers ( $N = 475$ ) were collected from six Norwegian teacher education institutions. The teacher education institutions were approached through gatekeepers (i.e., personnel whom the researchers already knew). Questionnaires were personally distributed by one of the authors and filled out before, during breaks or following a plenary lecture, with an across site response rate of about 80 per cent. The Norwegian Social Science Data Services approved the study. Open, closed and numeric response categories were applied.

### **Sample**

The mean age in the preservice teacher sample was 30 ( $SD = 8.2$ ,  $n = 438$ ) and 64 per cent of the sample were female.

### **Questionnaire**

The Norwegian version of the questionnaire was developed in cooperation with Australian colleagues and consisted of six parts (see e.g., Helleve et al., 2013 for more details about how the Norwegian version was developed; Morris et al., 2012). Parts A-E was identical to the “Professional Interactions and Behaviours Scale” (PIBS, Morris, 2012), which is piloted, tested, and validated (Morris, 2016). Part F aimed to investigate the participants’ personal experiences with SNS in teaching. This part included questions about SNS in teaching within the participants’ teacher education institution and questions about SNS in

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## Results and analyses

Statistical analyses were performed with the IBM SPSS Statistics version 21. Open response categories were analysed with Microsoft Excel.

### Education in ethics and perceived adequacy

Most preservice teachers (85 %/n=462) reported to have some (1-5 hrs., 47 %), a moderate amount (6-10 hrs., 23 %) or a lot (11-20 hrs., 15 %) education in ethics included in their studies so far. Most reported to have had adequate education to some (55 %, n=210) extent. Descriptive results are portrayed in Table 1.

**Table 1** Amount (%) of preservice teachers (n=384) who reported experiencing their current degree having prepared them adequately to deal with ethical issues in the teaching profession.

	Frequency (n)	Per cent (%)
Not at all	18	4.7
Somewhat adequate	210	54.7
Moderately adequate	112	29.2
Very adequate	44	11.5
Total	384	100

### Negative SNS experiences

Of the total sample (n=475), 439 (92 %) responded to the question that asked if they personally or any of their friends had experienced negative SNS experiences of any kind. The question participants were asked was: "Have you, or your friends had any negative experiences using Social Networking Sites? (please explain)". 33 per cent (n=144/439) described their own or any of their friends' experiences in an open-ended response category. Of these, 88 per cent (n=127) had completed education in ethics.

The participants were then categorized into two groups. *Group 1* "low extent" (61 %, n=77),

Perceived adequate education in ethics: A way to tap into ethical Social Networking Sites awareness? consisted of participants who reported that their current degree not at all or to some degree had prepared them to deal with ethical issues in the teaching profession. Participants who reported that their current degree moderately or very much had prepared them to deal with ethical issues in the teaching profession were categorized into *Group 2* “high extent” (39 %, *n*=50).

Open response categories were analysed with template analysis (see e.g., King, 1998). The core of this analysis is that “the researcher produces a list of codes (a ‘template’) representing themes identified in their textual data” (King, 1998, p. 118). In this study, the second and third author coded the data after the initial analysis was done by the first author to secure inter coder reliability. The data mainly consisted of short sentences. Consequently, higher-level templates were not applied.

The template analysis yielded three main templates or categories based on whether the person or persons who were experiencing negative experiences using SNS’s where either “Others”, “Themselves” or “Unspecified”. In Table 2, some examples of the content of these three codes are illustrated.

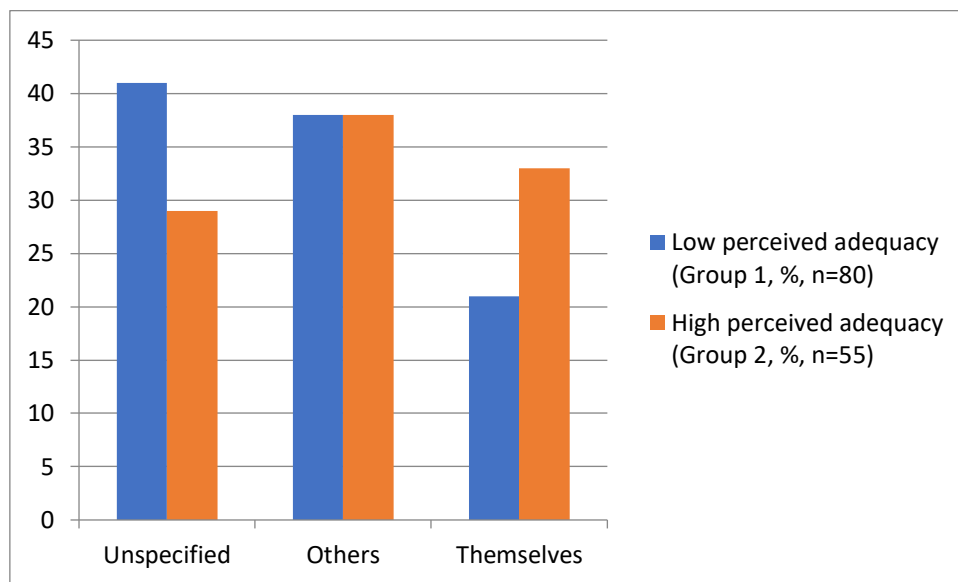
**Table 2** The content of the three categories

(1) “ <i>Others</i> ”	Experiences that concerned the participants own children, friends and fellow students. Examples: “ <i>During praxis I experienced that a pupil was pestered by classmates on youtube.com</i> ” and “ <i>Yes, a friend experienced that a stranger created a fake profile on Facebook by copying a picture</i> ”.
(2) “ <i>Themselves</i> ”	Descriptions of the participants own negative SNS experiences. Examples: “ <i>I have been involved in rather nasty disputes with total strangers</i> ” and “ <i>Yes, I have been contacted by older men who have impersonated younger males. I have been offered alcohol for pictures of myself when I was a minor</i> ”
(3) “ <i>Unspecified recipients</i> ”	Neither own nor directly others’ experiences. Example: « <i>gossip</i> », « <i>negative comments on Facebook</i> » and « <i>Arguments and quarrels can become</i>

	<i>rather blurred».</i>
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*Group 1*, as previously mentioned, consisted of participants who to a low extent perceived that they had experienced adequate education in ethics in their studies until now. Among these participants, the results showed that the categories with most responses predominantly was “Unspecified recipients” (n=33, 41 %), followed by “Others” (n=30, 38 %) and “Themselves” (n=17, 21 %). *Group 2* consisted of participants that to a high extent perceived to have experienced adequate education in ethics. Here, the most prevalent category was “Others” (n=21, 38 %), followed by “Themselves” (n=18, 33 %), and “Unspecified recipients” (n=16, 29 %).

As some of the described experiences could be categorised by several codes, the total number of coded experiences comprised of eighty (group 1), and fifty-five (group 2), respectively. An illustration of the results is portrayed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** An illustration of the findings of content of codes across groups who have experienced their current degree as low (group 1) or high (group 2) in preparing them to deal with ethical issues in the teaching profession.

As illustrated in Figure 1, participants who had experienced a high extent of adequate education in ethics reported more awareness of personal negative SNS experiences. Awareness of more personal negative SNS content may be interpreted as a form of conscious competence and known area. Even though awareness of negative experience of “unspecified” and “themselves” differed in relation to perceived adequacy of education in ethics, negative content experiences concerning others (e.g., spouse, pupils, and colleagues) was equally common among both groups.



## Discussion

This study has investigated preservice teachers' perceived adequacy of ethics education, and how perceived usefulness of ethics education related to how aware preservice teachers reported to be, regarding own and others negative SNS experiences. The results showed that most preservice teachers reported to have some, a moderate amount of or a high amount of education in ethics. Preservice teachers differed in how well they perceived education in ethics to prepare them for dealing with ethical issues in the teaching profession. Preservice teachers who felt that ethics education had prepared them well, reported more awareness of personal negative SNS content (e.g., been offered alcohol for pictures), than preservice teachers who reported ethics education to be less useful.

According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011), education in ethics is one arena to make sense of and deal with ethics in education. The development of professional code, that is, what is perceived as good or bad and right or wrong, and how and why professional teachers behave as they do, is closely linked to his/her personal codes (Colnerud, 1995). In this study, most preservice teachers reported to have education in ethics. About half of the total sample perceived to have received education in ethics that prepared them well for future professional ethical issues. As more preservice teachers report to have had education in ethics than those who report to profit well from it, ethics education seems to hold unreleased potential concerning ethics.

Another finding was that preservice teachers who reported to have received education in ethics that was perceived as being low on perceived adequacy, also reported less personal negative SNS experiences than other preservice teachers. According to Loughran (2006), preservice teachers need to reflect on their previous experiences in order to decide what kind of teachers they want to be. So, when preservice teachers are asked to reflect on previous SNS experiences in the role as future teachers, they may utilise pre-professional experiences. These experiences may provide a base for discussions of potential ethical issues in ethics education.

The lack of perceived adequate education in ethics combined with lack of awareness of negative SNS experiences may indicate an unreleased form of unconscious competence (Miller, Vandome & McBrewster, 2011). The assumption being that discussions concerning personal experiences of on- and offline situations and issues that may be of ethical concern may be one way to prepare preservice teachers for future professional development through the possibility of illuminating more of areas of oneself. Thus, lack of awareness of negative personal SNS experiences may be an obstacle towards facilitating that preservice teachers get in touch with more of their personal experiences, and further, connect their own experiences to their ongoing professional development.

Another interpretation of the finding that lack of perceived adequate education in ethics

Perceived adequate education in ethics: A way to tap into ethical Social Networking Sites awareness? combined with lack of awareness of negative SNS experiences may indicate that some, more than other preservice teachers, to lesser extent wish to disclose their personal experience (hidden area, Luft, 1969). Thus, they have personal negative SNS experiences, but do not wish to present them to others. Self-presentation may be defined as “the process of presenting oneself in relationship to socially and culturally accepted modes” of behaving and acting (Reber, 1995, p. 704). This process has been described as one of many ways to act online and in relation to SNS’s (boyd, 2014). Thus, lack of presented personal negative SNS content, may also be a result of more or less willingness to break a barrier in self-disclosure.

## Strengths and limitations

A strength of this study is that it provides an overall picture of the amount of education in ethics preservice teachers have had, as well as how well they perceive this education to prepare them for dealing with ethical issues as future professional teachers. Preservice teachers were asked about amount and perceived adequacy of education in ethics in their current teacher education. It is however not known whether amount of education in ethics, taking place before teacher education, indirectly may have influenced our findings. Further, in this study, templates were analysed into who were at the receiving end of negative SNS experiences (self, other, unspecified). Other ways of categorising negative SNS experiences (i.e., technical, illegal, normative) may provide other insights into how adequate education in ethics is related to ethical SNS awareness. We interpret more awareness of own negative SNS experiences as an indication of more ethical SNS awareness. It should be noted that some preservice teachers may in fact have experienced more negative SNS content than others. Thus, it may be that some preservice teachers not only are more aware, but also more vulnerable, as they also may be more exposed to personal negative SNS experiences than others.

## Conclusion

This study has investigated preservice teachers’ perceived adequacy of ethics education, and how perceived usefulness of ethics education relates to how aware preservice teachers’ report to be regarding own and others negative SNS experiences. Most preservice teachers reported to have had some to a high amount of education in ethics. However, they differed in how well they perceived education in ethics had prepared them for dealing with ethical issues in the teaching profession. Preservice teachers who felt that education in ethics had prepared them well reported more awareness of personal negative SNS content (e.g., been offered alcohol for pictures), than preservice teachers who reported ethics education to be less useful.

Perceived adequate education in ethics: A way to tap into ethical Social Networking Sites awareness? We find that ethics education seems to hold unreleased potential when it comes to preparing preservice teachers for dealing with ethical issues in the teaching profession. Adequate education in ethics provides a possibility to reflect and discuss personal and professional SNS experiences that again may support the development of a professional stance in these matters. One way to do this may be to encourage preservice teachers to share, reflect and discuss personal and others' SNS experiences as this may increase personal and professional ethical SNS awareness. Increased awareness (conscious competence and increased known area) may promote preservice teachers' ethical SNS awareness.

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