**MAINSTREAM SECONDARY TEACHERS’ PERCEPTION TOWARDS SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTUBE IN THE FIELD OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study attempts to deepen our understanding of teachers’ perception and use of social media especially Facebook and YouTube as part of their continuous professional development. Faced with an increasing number of students with special educational needs, the emerging Web.02 learning and teaching methods and the increasing phenomenon of burnout, teachers’ redefinition of their educational role and construction of knowledge in the 21st century become imperative. The study has been conducted on the grounds of defining motivated teachers as those who are willing to adapt to the Web.02 learning environment and develop their cognitive, metacognitive and resilience skills through social interactions and visual observation conducted online and especially on Facebook and YouTube.

This qualitative research study employed semi-structured interviews with seven mainstream secondary teachers, generating a host of data on the importance of network and sharing content communities (SNS-Social Networking Sites) in peer –to –peer learning, resilience through building bonds and creating the “community feeling”. The thematic analysis and interpretation of the results showed that teachers use Facebook and YouTube as a resilience and a self -regulated learning mechanism against isolation and lack of practical and academic knowledge on SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) issues.

Among the themes emerged from interviews were also teachers’ need for peer role models, inspiration and motivation into becoming more improvising in order to implement the digitally-based pedagogies into their teaching and willing to become self-directed life long learners able to combine both theoretical and practical knowledge in a digitally addicted era. Despite the interest in social media and digital pedagogies, no one to the best of my knowledge has shed light to the reasons and effects social networked communities have on teachers ‘emotional state and professional development. A further research could lead to a potential constructive exploitation of these online communities towards the benefits of special and mainstream education. The interesting part of a deeper investigation in this area would involve cooperation among various disciplines such as phycology, education, special education, technology and even marketing and statistics to validate these findings.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

Emoticons: graphical representation of feelings in a form of small faces

Meme: social idea distributed online using images

PLE: Professional Learning Environment

PLN: Professional Learning Network

SDL: Self-Directed Learning

SEND: Specific Educational Needs and Disabilities

SRL: Self-Regulated Learning

**CHAPTER 1**

**INTRODUCTION**

The primary aim of this qualitative study is to explore mainstream secondary teachers’ experience with the most popular social networked communities, Facebook and YouTube when seeking information on SEND issues.

The objectives of this small-scale study were to explore:

• Mainstream teachers’ of secondary education use of social media to get informed on special education issues, their way of engagement and the implementation of that knowledge in their daily practice.

• Teachers’ resilience and knowledge regarding their SEND work, through their use of social media, mainly Facebook and YouTube.

Research on the connection of social media to teachers’ self-directed cognitive development and resilience in inclusive educational environments, where SEND issues are dominant, is very limited to non-existent. While there is a considerable number of studies on each field separately there seems to be a literature gap where all the pre-mentioned fields can be connected in the face of W.0.2 (O Reilly, 2005) and potential W.03 movement that characterizes this digital era.

On the grounds of the given facts that teachers are more prone to burnout now than ever before due to several reasons, one being not equipped with the theoretical and practical knowledge to deal with learning disabilities, and the emerging number of social media special education communities that advocate in favour of inclusion, we can assume that teachers need support and that social media is one of the most accessible way to achieve that. Since the study surrounds the area of resilience and professional development through social media as a type of informal self-directed education, we will hypothesize that social media promotes dialectical thinking whose implications on teachers’ education has received little attention within the academic circles.

**CHAPTER 2**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

*“Half of what you'll learn in medical school will be shown to be either dead wrong or out of date within five years of your graduation; the trouble is that nobody can tell you which half -- so the most important thing to learn is how to learn on your own” (cited in Daily & Landis, 2014, p. 2066)*

With the advancement of technology the conflict between the instructional and learning paradigm becomes more intense (Bass, 2012,p.24 in Stoeckel & Sinkinson, 2013). Teachers are perceived in this study as life long learners who benefit from all types of education formal, non-formal, informal,self-regulated or self-directed. Controversy, however, is raised between the formal educational fixed system based on a pre-determined curricula and the informal one, which can be achieved through receptive knowledge acquired from interactions and experience. A number of researchers argue that both ways of learning can construct the identity of the 21st century educator able to cope with the challenges of an inclusive classroom full of digitally native students (Kuh, 1996, Traxler & Petit, 2007, Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012,Sharples, 2006; Stoeckel & Sinkinson, 2013).

The below chapters will highlight how teachers’ knowledge, identity and expectations have been evolved due to the digital revolution. The importance of academic, formal and informal teachers’ education is acknowledged, however, there seems to be a gap that informal self-directed networks could fill in. In order to understand teachers’ professional development options I will explain the difference between self-regulated and self-directed learning. My focus in on the learning that occurs with no institutionalised intervention but though dialogue among peers of all levels of hierarchy and education though Facebook and YouTube (SDL). Later I will present what constitutes teachers’ knowledge in a digital world as well as the current trends in digital pedagogies. Finally I will conclude with literature that explains the SNSs effect on teachers’ professional development and resilience and I will try to connect it to Facebook and YouTube’s contribution and limitations.

**2.1 Informal, Formal Self-Directed vs Self-Regulated Learning**

Constructed on the idea that social media enhance and facilitate lifelong learning as a necessary process for teachers’ professional development and education on SEND, a clear distinction between each category is imperative. Mocker and Spear (1982) introduce four types of lifelong learning: formal (academic institutions control the learning procedure); non formal (academic institutions provide the means and the learner decides); informal (learners control the means); and self-directed (learners are in charge of the whole learning process).

SDL, according to Knowles (1975) is the individuals’ ability to realise their learning gaps and needs, set educational goals and reach these goals though a proper selection and reflection of learning sources and strategies. Weinert (1982) on the other hand, defines SRL as a cognitivist procedure where the learner is completely independent.

Several publications have appeared in recent years, in the field o of medical education, documenting the importance of self-directed learning. Morrison and Premkumar (2014) recognize that graduate medicine students are unlikely to develop the necessary cognitive and metacognitive skills to engage in a self-directed learning procedure. However their study advocates in favour of the creation and strategies to reverse this fact. One element of SDL, related to this study, is active collaboration: the ability to connect with other self-motivated peers who share the same interest and passion with each other. This is where the contribution of SNS can be beneficial. However, although there are many academic papers on medical education and social media (Duncan et al., 2012, Kind and Evans, 2015, Cheston et al, 2013, Forgie et al, 2013) there seems to be a literature gap on the implementation of social media, Facebook and YouTube in this case, on mainstream teachers’ self-directed education on SEND issues.

**2.2 Beyond Teachers’ subject knowledge**

Ellis (2007, p.447) perceives teachers ‘subject knowledge as situated, emerging within complex and dynamic social systems in contrast to the dualistic, individualist and objectivist view. She regards subject knowledge as communal and collective (p.458) and as part of teachers’ intellect, which is built through strong and constructive relationships and interactions. Mentors also play a role in teachers’ professional development. Social media can contribute in forming bonds and gaining practical knowledge. For instance, mainstream teachers are not adequately educated on SEND issues since special education is not part of the mainstream curriculum but an independent academic subject. Therefore, English teachers’ subject knowledge is the English language and literature but how would this purely cognitive-based definition of knowledge as a “commodity that can be counted (‘audited’), ‘boosted’ or ‘topped up’ outside of practice” (Ellis, 2007,p.450) help mainstream educators teach in inclusive learning environments?

Social media is based on sharing information and knowledge and therefore promoting communication. Teachers’ role, hence, must be adapted to the new social reality of networked communities for the teachers to be able to teach the ‘digitally native’ (Prensky, 2006) learners. This transformative knowledge requires the educator to be constantly evolving professionally. As a result teachers’ subject knowledge is not only limited within the technical information of the subject they teach but they are also required to be digitally and technologically oriented, develop metacognitive skills, critical self-reflection (Kegan, 2000 in Mezirow, 2003,p.60) and reflective judgment and also to be able to engage in dialogue as part of the transformative adult learning (Mezirow, 2003 p.203). Teachers are perceived as adult learners, students whose cognitive skills as well as social, financial and cultural contexts may differ. There is no doubt that being a teacher equals to being committed to life-long learning. Traditional learning methods, even in the teachers’ professional development field, are based on institutionalized instruction, which is a part of global market economy (Hall, 2009) since it is mostly privatized. This way most teachers that do not have the financial means to update their knowledge, especially when it comes to learning disabilities are excluded.

On the other hand modern private literacy based on Social Networking sites such as Facebook and sharing content networks, YouTube, is based on curiosity, a self-guided and independent synthesis of information that requires from individuals a critical ability to interpret, evaluate and separate which data are useful towards their evolvement (Schleicher, 2012).

**2.3 Practitioner and Networked Knowledge( Albion & Muddux, 2007): completing the puzzle of teachers’knowledge**

Lieberman and Mace (2010) highlight another controversial issue in education especially in special education the difference between practitioner knowledge and professional knowledge.” Practitioner knowledge comes from the problems of practice as they are ‘detailed complete and specific’ (Hiebert,Gallimore & Stingler, 2002,p.6 cited in Lieberman & Mace,2010). Special education is not a field easily accessible to novice teachers. In fact teachers in mainstream education are not qualified to SEND issues and their survival is an inclusive classroom depends on their cooperation with experienced practitioners in special education. However, Lieberman and Mace (2010) Address the issue of teacher’s isolation in their working environments and the lack of cooperation among teachers.

Ferguson and Ralf (1996) as well as Berry (2006) also focus on this knowledge gap between special and mainstream teachers. Their study reveals that mainstream educators have limited to no training on special education issues and special educators are not aware of mainstream education teachers’ practices. Teachers’ making their practices available online could bridge that gap in education.However, a new type of knowledge is now required from teachers in order the project “making practice public”(Lieberman &Mace,2010) to be effective: The Networked Knowledge.

The networked knowledge era has shifted teachers’ attention from the accumulation of knowledge to the transformation of knowledge. While in the past teachers’ effectiveness depended on their knowledge of the subject they taught, now teachers need to be digitally literate and be able to obtain skills through interacting online and sharing. Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005) examine the learning metaphors of acquiring knowledge as individual learners (monological approach), knowledge gained through social interactions (dialogical approach), whilst also introducing the new term of “trialogical approach” where knowledge is created through collaborative tasks, social connections and participation in SNS. Their “trialogical approach” to knowledge seems to overlap with Ellis’ situated subject knowledge

**2.4. Current learning theories related to social networked communities**

Some of the current learning methods and approaches connected to SNSs will be discussed in the subsections below. Although they have been implemented in formal and informal self regulated learning within academic contexts, the belief of this study is that they can provide the base for self directed leaning as well. Dialogue and Connectivism , Professional Learning Environments (PLE),the Open Source of Educative model and Experiential learning ,are some of the theories which connect social media to constructive adult professional development.

**2.4.1 Dialogue and Connectivism**

Ravenscroft (2011) emphasizes connectivism (Siemens, 2005) a form of constructivism, related more to andragogy learning, in the digital era.

*“..connectivism, with its deliberate focus on the here-and-now reality of how digital networks support new forms of connections, social relations, and dialogue, provides a sociotechnical frame or set of creative constraints within which contemporary social constructivist activities occur”*

He focuses on the importance of the development of dialectic and dialogic thinking through networked environments with the purpose of teachers’ professional development and knowledge acquisition. Social media, therefore, can act as a place for discourse to promote dialectical thinking as a form of teachers’ cognitive development regarding Special Education.

Mezirow (2003,p.61), in addition, mentions the term “critical-dialectical discourse” as a step of transformative learning. She supports that through critical dialogue individuals can develop advanced metacognitive abilities of reflective critical skills and judgments.” Dialectic thinking allows for acceptance of inherent contradictions and have ambiguities, alternative truths and different world views” (Merriam, 2004,p.64). This transformative way of learning can be achieved in the Web 02 environment with individuals who are willing to be engaged in that. It can be assumed, at the lack of statistical evidence data that teachers choose to be engaged in Facebook groups and YouTube channels according to their field of interest. Therefore the possibilities of developing the cognitive skills and dialectical thinking are high. Merriam’s (2004) study reveals connections of cognitive development and transformational learning with teachers’ educational level (Wilson, 1996 in Merriam, 2004, p. 63) and Self-directed Attitude (Kasworm, 1983). Mezirow (1998) also adds that the ability of reflection acts as a way to construct knowledge.

Although Merriam’s theory poses a constructivist concept of knowledge to social interactions and reflection however the social interactions formed in online environments were not taken into consideration due to the era of the publication. McLaughlin’s (2008) study examines the emerging learning theories under the light of the digital era this learning theory is also involved new redefinition of teachers role as lifelong learners, introducing the PAH (Pedagogy-Andragogy-Heutagogy) typologies in education and the concept of PLC. In addition, Graffin (2017) explains the terms “PLN” (Professional Learning Networks) as part of the Connectivism theory and the “connected educator” who acts as a networked learner and interacts with other learners through the construction of PLNs.

Facebook and YouTube are currently acting as PLNs, however they lack credit from the academic community and present several ethical implications, when teachers’ little confidence over balancing or merging their personal and professional lives online refrain them from using it wisely.(Fox et.al,2015)

**2.4.2 Professional Learning Environments and Self Regulated Learning**

Current studies have been focuses on PLE as a form of SRL leaving the gap this study addresses open. Dabbagh and Kisantas (2012) provide a framework on how social media can be incorporated as part of the SRL process through the construction of PLE (professional learning environments). However their area of study is focused on strategies within academic environments. YouTube and Facebook in the hope of adapting it to SDL strategies for peer-to-peer education where little to no research has been made. They provide a framework where most social media, including Facebook and YouTube, can be used within formal and informal academic contexts, providing the base for a more specific framework suggested in chapter 6.

A broader approach that can also be applied to the concept of teachers’ empirical learning through social media online communities has been explained in MacLoughlin and Lee’s (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008,p.641) study where they praise social networking as a means of collaboration, dialogue, support and an unlimited source of ideas and data.

**2.4.3 Open source educative processes**

Glassman and Ju (2016) advocate in favour of embracing the new coming way of thinking adapted to this digital era through the Open source educational model (Preston, 2009) process. It is a learning process where social media as well as other Internet tools are used to create dynamic educational communities. They argue that the Open Source educational approach, which is established in education online, allows teachers as learners to be responsible for their own learning experiences through interacting with other experienced educators. The success of this project is based on the critical ability of learners as well as a degree of their motivation. “Crystallized intelligent” (Glassman & Kang, 2012 in Glassman & Ju, 2016) is considered the foundation stone of Open Source model and it is required for the successful interaction within the social communities.

**2.4.4 Experiential learning**

Kolb’s (2015) experiential learning approach is another pedagogical model, which could serve as the philosophical foundation of the adult, self-directed, informal education through social media and particularly YouTube. Kolb’s work was based on the writings and studies of Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky among other constructivists. Specifically, Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory which constitutes the foundation of constructivism is based on social interaction as part of cognitive development, the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development. Similarly, experiential learning requires learning from experience that comes from observation and interaction with the studied environment. It is the “learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied” (Keeton& Tate, 1978 in Kolb, 2015). Social media and YouTube provide the space for the experiential learning to take place since it fits all constructivist criteria. Kaye’s (2002 in Kolb, 2015) counterargument against the recent critique on experiential learning is that in order to fully conceptualize the ELT effect, researchers should associate it with “Vygotsky’s socio constructivist theory …and the role of personal knowledge and social knowledge in experiential learning”(Kolb, 2015,intro xxv).

YouTube, as a video-sharing network with an unlimited range of videos, many of them educational and instructional, is the ideal tool to experiential learning. There are millions of videos that inform, educate and psychologically support, by presenting different perspectives, teachers on general special education issues. There are videos or families who have children who belong in the special educational spectrum, that record their daily life and the challenges they face, in the hope of building empathy, raising awareness and reforming education. Educators learn through observing not merely listening, writing or reading. This type of informal experiential learning has been incorporated in higher education as part of the lectures. YouTube videos are also used extensively to provide visual stimuli to students in all the level of education.

Although a large number of studies have been conducted on the integration of social media and YouTube in the classroom, however less attention has been given on their impact on teachers’ personal, social and professional knowledge, self-regulated-learning and resilience.

Arnold and Paulus (2010) highlight the use of experiential learning opportunities created through the use of social media and specifically Ning, an online platform for open source applications and the launching of social networks. The preference of Ning over Facebook was Facebook’s self-centred nature, which demands the creation of personal accounts (profiles), the addition of other people to that profiles’ friend list and the posting of personal or professional data. Although, Facebook is more helpful in order to understand the influence of online social communities on teachers’ knowledge and emotional state, however Arnold and Paulus’ study was focused on a controlled group of social actors, university students in this case, aspire to use the experiential learning techniques, taught as part of their course, in a professional networked environment as potential teachers. Those techniques involve four stages: reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation and concrete experience (Kolb et al., 2001).

**2.5 Can teachers keep up with the change?**

The shift from pedagogy to heutagogy (Pierre & Pierre, 2015), the emphasis from children’s’ education to adults’ self determined professional development and the turn to social media as a form of informal and self –directed education could be due to teachers’ feelings of disappointment towards formal education with providing the cognitive, metacognitive and dialectical skills that construct the educators’ knowledge, personality and resilience to cope in inclusive learning environments. Liston, Whitcomb and Borko (2006) as well as MacBlain and Purdy (2011) point out that the overwhelming demands derive from that transition as well as the inefficiency of higher education to provide this new form of practical knowledge, have contributed to the increase of the burnout phenomenon especially among teachers who choose to abandon the profession.

Szeto and his colleagues (2015), however, argue that teachers who were born after 1990 are Digital natives and hence digitally literate. Therefore young teachers are more aware and familiar with the impact SNS’s, specifically YouTube and Facebook, use and integration, can have on their confidence and teaching as a consequence (Bonder et.al. 2013). Sveto and his colleagues (2015) recognize three types of pre-service teachers’

Pedagogy, emerging from integrating social media in their teaching: “followers of direct pedagogy”, “explorers of constructivist pedagogy” and “challengers of participatory pedagogy”. However the study is focused on social media’ s integration into the curriculum and not on its effect on teachers as independent learners using interdependency and proactive participation as key elements in adult learning.

MacBain and Purdy (2011) highlight the phenomenon of more and more teachers abandoning the profession in England. They present Woolcock’s (2007 in MacBain et al.2011, p.381) reports” the figures show that 95.500 teachers left the profession between 2000 and 2005 and believe that the increase of this phenomenon is associated with teachers’ levels of confidence and stress. A Swedish statistics study predicted that the educational system will lose 22 000 teachers, approximately 20% of the teaching workforce, by 2020 (Statistics Sweden, 2012; Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2012 in Lindqvist and Nordanger, 2016, p.88). They claim that the change in the educational reality which demands the teachers to be multitasking and multi-skilled as well as digitally literate and able to cope with students cultural, cognitive and emotional diversity, stresses them to the point of leaving the profession. The increasing numbers of children with special educational needs, in combination with the inadequacy of higher education to provide the necessary practical and theoretical knowledge, are issues that are according to MacBain and Purdy should be addressed. Their study however is focused on teachers gaining the necessary skills to increase confidence when they are students and emphasizes their continuous support within the first year of their teaching. Although this proposal is theoretically correct, the global economy seems to make it practically impossible. Continuous teachers’ professional support mechanism would be a burden that at this point, global economy is not able to carry. Teachers’ financial state, on the other hand, does not allow them to provide for their own formal professional development.

**2.6 Building resilience through Facebook and YouTube**

A recent study that discusses the same research questions by Carpenter, Trust and Krutka (2016) demonstrates the importance of social media in teachers’ professional development and resilience. In particular they mention that teachers’ feelings of isolation stress and burnout were overcome or prevented to a considerable extent through their participation in the social media educational communities.

Studies also revealed that the majority of mainstream teachers do not fully collaborate with the special educators (Dreyer & Lorna, 2013) while there seem to be issues of inequality, a misconception of roles and lack of mutual respect among them (Keefe & Moore, 2003).

Carpenter and his colleagues (2017,p.25) use that term “professional learning network (Trust, 2013;Carpenter et al., 2016,p 25) to describe the educational communities where teachers are engaged online in order to grow professionally and be encouraged psychologically. Dwight and Babinski (2003) also acknowledge that “False expectations, shattered dreams, and serious attacks on one’s confidence and self worth… are the all too common experiences of beginning teachers”. They stressed the importance of dialogue and collegiality support elements that according to them rarely exist. Brownell et al (2006) also agree that also professional collaboration and among special and general teachers is considered the most powerful tool towards an inclusive environment, however there is only a small number of teachers who are engaged in strategies that support collaboration and have proven to be effective.

The lack of these elements leads to teachers’ physical and social isolation and diminishes the productive feeling of community and harms both, the new and experienced teachers’ morale.

Online communities such as Facebook and YouTube provide the ground where emotional support and feelings of community can be developed. The concept of community as a resilience mechanism is not new. Tellez (1992), and many other researchers confirm that social groups of individuals who share common values knowledge and experience can have a positive effect on teachers’ resilience. Dialogue and personal narratives are some of the techniques that reinforce resilience and can be implemented in online communities. Through sharing their stories, teachers develop a sense of critical reflection and curiosity, which in turns promotes learning and thought (Nodding & Witherell, 1991; Sawyer & Rim-Kaufman, 2007;Fox&Wilson, 2015).

Sharing, however, does not come without a cost, especially in Facebook and YouTube communities where there is no anonymity, at least in the educational learning communities. According to Hardy (2014) social media gives teachers the opportunities to express their opinions on educational policies, especially on Special Education Needs and inclusion issues and break down the barriers between teachers due to hierarchy and different educational levels. They also, provide the grounds for all teachers all over the world and of different levels to interact, discuss on pedagogies, share ideas, reflect, motivate an inspire. This, according to Hardy (2014) is not feasible within school environments and working hours.

**2.7 The importance and contribution of the study**

A considerable number of publications have appeared in recent years documenting how social media, Internet and technology (virtual reality) have affected the three existing learning and teaching methods of pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy. However, their research area is focused on how universities provide the digitally transformative knowledge and how they integrated them in their curriculum. The focus of the study however is not on how institutions of higher education have adjusted their teaching and learning techniques to the Web.02 movement using social media but how teachers learn from each other through the potential that social media provide: networked knowledge, online educational communities and dialogue. Therefore no tutors, lecturers or institutions are required but mentors/ teachers who are able to activate and motivate these communities through collaboration and constructive instructions.

Facebook is one of the best social media platforms that can provide this kind of interaction and community feeling. It is known that most teachers own Facebook accounts, if not for professional reasons they certainly use it for personal interactions. However teachers’ identity is not limited only to a professional level. Teachers are social beings; individuals that can be admired inspired and form connections within their social and professional circle as much as other individuals do. Facebook, with 2 billion monthly users, has become peoples’ online identity and teachers are part of this world.

**Conclusion**

This body of literature has explored the importance of social networks, based on the constructivism paradigm, to individuals’ professional and personal life .The study expanded the concept of social communities to the online social communities since there is little research there .All the existing papers seem to analyse SNSs importance in Self- Regulated learning within academic instruction, mostly analysing PLN (professional learning networks) and how these benefit students. Facebook and YouTube, although being the two most popular. SNSs are have been neglected by the academic world as a source of self-directed teachers ‘education through social interaction and observation.

**CHAPTER 3**

**METHODOLOGY**

**3.1 The ontological and epistemological background of the study**

*“The value of ontology, whether philosophical or scientific, lies in bringing clarity and directionality”. (cited in Lawson, 2004, p4)*

Ramey and Grubb (2009) define ontology as the science of identifying social reality. Through identifying the ontology and worldview (Creswell.2003) of his topic of study, researchers can detect the approaches they must use to successful report and investigate a phenomenon.

The nature of the social construct of the current study needs to be investigated under a subjective, cognitive and social perspective. The ontology underpinned in this paper lies in Subjectivism, which is a form of relativism contrasted to Post-positivism and realism. It is based on the notion that reality is socially constructed (Bourdieu, 1989).

The current study is based on the impact a socially constructed phenomenon, social media and YouTube, has on secondary teachers’ professional life and development. An effort through data collection and analysis will be made to investigate the ways and reasons that lie behind its use. Subjectivism leads to the epistemology within the Constructive/Interpretive paradigm, which transcends a simple observation of a phenomenon and investigates, through subjective analysis and interpretation, the reasons behind the social actors’ actions (Myers, 1999). The researcher’s aim is to understand this phenomenon within its social contexts as well as the social groups’ interactions within it. Costructivists/Interpretivists support that knowledge is not only constructed but also influenced by the interactions of the social actors involved. This entails the adoption of research strategies that include both cognitive and social criteria that can emerge from the participants’ willingness to share and exchange experiences and information. Education, for example, is considered an objective indicator but through social interactions, life situations and individual perspectives, it can be subjectively interpreted and its collective interpretation can construct a social reality (Flick et al, 2004).

Van Gorp (2006) explains that relationships are essential to the construction of reality. Social media and video sharing network pages are constructed and function due to the social members’ interaction and their ability to share their reality which is subjective to their individual perception and interpretation. Therefore, the relativistic ontology accepts knowledge derived from individual reflection and empirical experience.

Robson (1993) adds that constructivism is the most appropriate theoretical perspective related to social science, as part of the relativistic ontology opposed to extreme realism, which cannot depict reality accurately.

Therefore, the reality constructed and subjected to the participants’ and the researcher’s, as part of this social group, interpretation is the acceptance of social media and YouTube as part of a new education era adapted to the contemporary and continually developing technological advances.

**3.2. Methodological Approach**

At a general level, qualitative research is often described as a naturalistic, interpretative approach concerned with exploring phenomena ‘from the interior’ (Flick,2009 in Ormstom et.al, 2013) and taking the perspectives and accounts of research participants a starting point” (Ormstom et al.,2013,p.3).

Quantitative research contains a wide variety of approaches and methods and it is characterized by its in-depth and “from the inside out” (Flick et al, 2004) investigation of the phenomena using mostly naturalistic and interpretive approaches. The nature of the phenomenon explored in this study is so ambiguous and faceted that it would be more fascinating to be explored in depth. This study is more concerned with “why”, “how” and “what” questions that convey the reasons that live behind the use of social media by teachers and for educational purposes.

That use of the qualitative approach as the methodology for this study came from the researcher’s internal conflict about adopting a strategy to answer her research questions. Despite the fact that as a novice researcher I had already an established hypothesis that wanted to prove through an inductive strategy that would be associated with grounded theory (Creswell, 2003), however, the small scale of this study along with my inexperience and the emerging ethical issues from researching the digital world refrained me from this reasoning technique. Another important reason is the limited research on the field of special education and social media. There are no prior statistical data for the study to be based on and prove the existing social reality formed by empirical data, in this case the increasing establishment and use of special education support and awareness groups on Facebook and channels on YouTube created for the needs of all educators.

The abductive research strategy (Blaikie, 2010) is related to the work of Giddens (1976), Weber (1964) and others within the ontological belief that social reality is constructed by social constructs and it is associated with Interpretivism and social constructionism. It was chosen as the means to investigate the way educators perceive the emerging role of social media and YouTube in education and special education in particular. The gap in literature and empirical evidence or a reliable explanation on the effects and reasons derived from the use of this social construct, calls for a more innovative and complex research strategy reasoning where the element of surprise lurks in data analysis (Flick et al.2004).

This research strategy although not widely used has been applied in the field of social sciences, business administration, accounting, information Technology and philosophy (, Braganza et al, 2009, Montessori,2011, Urdari, 2014, Abulof, 2015).

The research strategy is a key element of the study since it defines the construction and reasoning behind answering the research questions.

Whereas the Interpetive/Constructivism theory entails inductive reasoning and questions based on “what”, the uncharted nature of the phenomenon examined which relates the fields of social, technological, psychological and educational sciences would make the participants less reflective and more hesitant in revealing consciously the motives behind the use of the phenomenon. The researcher’s part also becomes more active, therefore a new strategy that would involve researchers’ inductive abilities to evoke the desirable results without affecting or leading the participant.

Taking this into consideration, I adopted Blaikie’s (2007) research strategy which combines the inductive and deductive ones using both “what” and “why” questions in order to construct a theory through qualitative research:

“The aim is to discover why people do what they do by uncovering the largely tacit, mutual knowledge, the symbolic meanings, intentions and rules, which provide the orientations for their actions” (Blaikie, 2007,p.89).

Blaikie (2007) also points out the immense contribution of the abductive strategy to the data analysis process of identification of themes and coding.

**Stages Of Abductive Reasoning and the Researcher’s role.**

The first stage of the abductive approach is to investigate how familiar is the social actor with the phenomenon under investigation in this study. My role was to find out how social actors include the phenomenon examined in their everyday life and the motives behind its use. The process would be unproductive if I was not empathetic towards the participants and not aware of the participants’ world. For stage one to be successful I, from an inside perspective, had to investigate thoroughly that the social actor is actually part of the world under scrutiny in order to be able to achieve an accurate and valid interpretation of the empirical data. The abductive reasoning strategy by (Flick et al ,2004, p.204) demanded to possess a kind of intuition when it comes to forming a hypothesis.

The second stage involves “member checking” (Blaike, 2007,p.90). The researcher task is to present accurate descriptions emerging from the participants’ testimony and approval after reflection. Member checking is an excellent validation tool that could prevent bracketing. However for ethical reasons that include participants’ privacy and future research goals, this stage will be excluded.

“In other words, the adaptive strategy involves developing descriptions and constructing theory that is grounded in everyday activities, and/or is a language and meanings of social actors” (Blaike, 2007,p.91).

Summarising the above, the reason behind the choice of using qualitative research lies in the nature of the phenomenon. This study aims at an in-depth investigation of how and why social media and YouTube are used by the teachers as a learning stimuli and psychological support when they experience difficulties in functioning in an inclusive classroom where multiple learning differences occur. Since there is a literature gap in this field of research, the researcher might face the element of surprise in the face of new and unexpected data that can only emerge through abundant and thorough narrations or observation. Interviews therefore are the only method applicable for this purpose and are part of qualitative research.

**3.3 Method of data collection**

**Interviews**

The challenge in constructivist research is showing that the participants’ perception of the phenomenon as stated in research findings is not solely based on researchers’ interpretation, but on the notion that the knower and the respondent can create together a common understanding which defines constructivism’s subjectivist epistemology (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, ). The implementation of semi-structured interviews boosts this cooperation.

The construction of the interview questions share the constructivism theoretical perspective. However no grounded theory was used as an analysis method, since I was not trying to validate a theory but examine all perspectives on the phenomenon. According to Charmaz (2007) the constructivist approach perceives the research construct and data analysis as a result of shared experiences and relationships among the social actors and the researcher.

Charmaz (2007) points out that interview questions should be general at the beginning to cover a wide range of experiences and narrow when the researcher needs to induce those experiences in a reflective manner. That can be achieved by just one question, which can trigger a wide analysis of experiences or probes and follow up questions without a detailed question guide. Since there is no way for a researcher to control the conversation, especially when he is empathetic and open to accept the participants’ experiences, the questions can as well be improvised during the interview. Charmaz (2007) also supports that when the frame of the interview is informal or conversational, the interview can be more productive since the participants feel more comfortable and reflective.

The above guided my interview questions. Due to an elaborate sampling strategy, the saturation point was achieved by the 5th interview. The interviews were face to face, varying from 30 to 45 minutes and took place in a friendly environment of the participants’ choice. The tone was completely friendly and informal with many humorous elements that led to a stress free and calm atmosphere (Taylot & Bodgan, 1984). My first concern was to make the participants realize that my purpose was not to judge them but learn from them, therefore I needed to be honest with them and express my need to become their student. The fact that they all had postgraduate studies in education and they were also aware of the ethical concerns and procedures involved, made the interview process easier and quicker.

A consent form and my advice to be honest and feel free to express their true feelings and perspectives were given to the interviewees. Their rights for anonymity and withdrawal were equally stressed.

During the interview, although the questions were initially thematically separated I was unable to keep that order. The participants were truly excited to reveal their experiences within the digital world and the reason behind their professional use that they were leading the discussion by providing an abundance of information. The questions therefore were open and exploratory and I was surprised to find out that they led to new outcomes (Roulston, 2010). Using prompts or extra sub –questions/prompts, to investigate the unexpected themes was also implemented (Smith et al, 2009). The interviews were recorded using my laptop’s software and stored in my icloud account.

After the end interview I thanked the participants for their contribution to the research and informed them that when the study is over they would receive a debriefing form. They were initially informed through mail, Facebook inbox messages or phone about the dates of the interviews. Anonymity and confidentiality were also pointed out however the participants felt completely overjoyed with the process that they seemed like their voices wanted to be heard and did not seem occupied with confidentiality issues. Appendix x presents the interview protocol with the Thematic Areas used.

**3.4 Research Design**

**Sampling**

Werner and Bernard (1994) points out that the researcher should choose an easily accessible site in order to gain the support of the participants. In my case this had already been established since the social world under investigation is connected online. My social circle is consisted of people who share and work in the area of education. Therefore, I had already been a member of an educational culture that separated itself from traditional teaching and attracted motivated teachers who recognized me as a colleague who could emphasize with them and understand their passion for a common purpose. That became obvious through their warmly acceptance of my invitation to interview them and become my Facebook friends before interview. Snowball sampling (Goodman,2011) was also put into practice through those social interactions.

Goodman (2011) defined snowball sampling as one of the methods for the researcher to access hard-to-reach social constructs. The recruiting process was initially developed by Coleman (1958) and Goodman (1961) and was introduced as a non-probability method to sampling design. The sampling frame of this study was quite challenging. While the social media are overwhelmed with pages created by educators to educators in general and special education, in many European countries and the USA, teachers in Greece seem to be reluctant in accepting the emerging use of social media and YouTube as a tool for professional social networking. This observation is depicted mostly on YouTube where there are thousands of educational channels from the USA and some European countries and almost none from Greece. However the aim of this study is not to examine the reasons that behold the Greek educational audience to be exposed to that but it is stated as an obstacle I had to overcome during the recruitment process. Snowballing has been criticized for being biased however if it is only used as an opportunistic method. However due to the nature of the topic of this study, snowballing was a necessary recruiting tool (Goodman, 1961).

Snowball sampling consists of the identification of the study subjects within the researcher social or professional circle and their further recruitment from the participants’ recommendations. From an ethical point of view, snowballing could be problematic when sensitive social issues are examined and the hidden populations do not want to be revealed (Lee, 1993). However this study does not involve sensitive issues or requires exposure that could cause and embarrassment to the participants.

An ethical snowball strategy would be the one that respects the subjects’ privacy. Therefore, I provided the subjects with the study’s information sheet and gently asked whether they are willing to recruit and distribute the briefing sheet, with my contact information, to their personal circle and to those they consider eligible for the interviews. I also provided the time to the potential subjects to decide whether they want to participate or not after careful consideration.

The only way to make sure that the study subjects are unbiased, I became part of the social construct. My area of interest has been education and teaching in a differentiated way using technology and multi sensory techniques to children and adults with learning differences. The innovation of my teaching has been promoted through my Facebook account attracted the teachers whose participation I was targeting to. My role as an inclusion and differentiated teaching advocate promoted through social media had not only triggered my interest towards this topic of research but also became a source of inspiration for other teachers that shared the same concerns as I do. The teachers that I met on the basis of my personal contacts and snowball strategy had already been within my social and digital contacts and I was able to witness their online involvement in educational pages as well as the use of YouTube and Facebook posts on educational issues online.

“As Mason (1996) and May (2002) point out purely ad hoc , opportunistic sampling strategy is not appropriate; rather, the sample needs to relate in some systematic manner to the social world and phenomena that a study seeks to throw light upon” (King & Horrocks, 2010, p.29).

The sampling of this study needed to be consisted of teachers in general secondary education that are motivated enough to help their students deal with special educational issues. Motivation is the key element that was almost impossible to be detected. The study hence defines teacher as motivated, the one who has acquired practical and theoretical knowledge though academic institutions and he/she is an active member of social media and video sharing sites, such as Facebook and YouTube. The latter are considered necessary tools for networking and sharing information worldwide a feature that defines our current era. Therefore, a teacher who is not part of this process lacks the ability to keep up with the pace of information on issues and developments of mainstream and special education and cannot be considered motivated. In order to establish the nonprobability, proposing sampling I had to embrace the concept of “culture” according to Geertz (2014,p214)” I take culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of laws but an interpretive one in search of meaning”.

**3.5. Data Analysis**

The data were analysed using the thematic approach to data analysis. According to Boyatzis (1998), “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.7).

Braun and Clarke (2006) divide theoretical approaches to data analysis in two different camps: the first includes the series that are based on a specific ontological and epistemological background and the second includes the methods that are more flexible and independent of any theoretical frameworks. In particular interpretive phenomenological analysis, I.P.A, (Smith and Osborn, 2003) and grounded theory (Claser, 1992, Strauss and Corvin, 1998) are some examples of theory driven approaches while thematic analysis can fit into both the essentialist and constructionist paradigm and provide the freedom of not having to follow strict guidelines based on a grounded hypothesis.

Attride-Stirling (2001) and Braun and Clarke (2006) agree that thematic analysis is a broad term of a not so popularly established approach of data analysis however they support its establishment as an independent data analysis since all methods are actually based on it.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is based on the type, the pattern of analysis as well as the level, which themes are to be recognized. There are two types of analysis, rich semantic description of entire accounts and more detailed analysis of the most important themes according to researchers’ focus of interest. This study is focused on “theoretical thematic analysis” which aims to explore in depth some themes of data based on a more nuanced type of analysis instead of the data driven pattern. Braun and Clarke (2006) divide the level of theme identification between the semantic or explicit level which examines all theme superficially but broadly and the latent or interpretive one which is based on description and in-depth interpretation of the data (Boyatzis, 1998, in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p14). This study adopted the interpretive approach, which is based on theoretical thematic analysis.

Phases of Thematic Analysis

1. Becoming familiar with the data through the interview process, translation and transcription, which entails reading and re-reading. Keeping notes and highlighting could be constructive.

2. Initial coding: recognizing themes and categorizing data according to the initial them. In Nvivo, nodes represent software codes.

3. Finding themes: position every code or node into a theme. Producing a “thematic map “could help in that process of analysis. A careful re reading of the entire data and codes could produce new themes coming from uncategorized codes. Dilemmas might emerge from doubts on weather themes are relevant, should be abandoned, narrow or rephrased as a broader category for a larger amount of codes.

4. Reviewing themes: This process involved the “reviewing and refinement of themes” (Braun and Clarke, 2006,p.21). In level one I had to review the coded data extracts by reading all the attached extracts for each theme to realize if they fit into a pattern. This process would detect any problematic themes and create new ones. The thematic map was? updated.

In level two entire data set were also reviewed to examine their validity and accuracy by working through the entire data. Re-coding was imperative since researcher’s reflection should be on alert

5. Defining and naming themes:

This stage involved defining and refining the themes of the analysis, and analysis of the data within them in other words ‘identifying the “essence” of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006,p.22). Simplicity was the key in this process. It involved re-reading the data and supporting it with quotations from the extracts. The quotations was in direct speech and nor paraphrased.

Each theme was also be accompanied by a detailed analysis and arguments on how it was related to the research questions. It was essential to reassure each theme’s uniqueness and avoid overlapping. Creating sub-themes to make the process simpler was also essential

One way to validate the reasoning of the themes is “to see whether you can describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentences. If you cannot do this, further refinement of that theme may be needed” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.22). Naming the themes was also part of this process.

6. Producing the report: The report should be concise and accurate supported by solid and valid arguments that should emerge by a clear analysis and categorization of themes and the evidence from the participants’ extracts.

**3.5.1 Using NVIVO**

I used Nvivo to realize all the above-mentioned process of thematic analysis digitally. The coded process was easier and more organized.

Nvivo is a software designed by USR international (Australia) to be used as a tool in qualitative research data analysis which can be very useful in making, isolating and categorizing data into scenes and assigning nodes for interpretation. This amazing quantity computer -assisted tool makes qualitative research more organized, time effective and manageable.

Richards (1999) explains that the initiation of the project that can store and link data and brainstorming ideas together is the first step. The complexity of the project depends on the researchers themselves and there are no restrictions. He continues that there are three systems responsible for the data organization: documents, nodes, and attributes. The systems are interlinked together by evaluating the attributes and coding the themes emerging from the documents and nodes.. Using Nvivo or any other computerized qualitative tool adds flexibility and makes organizing data less arduous. However, analysis has to be done by the researcher who has to establish the categories, assign codes, and decide how to identify and relate them as well as make the interpretation. NVivo and other products of qualitative research can be less effective when there is no standard interview questions pattern or the data are too rich and complex (Richards, 1999). However, Nvivo was extremely helpful due to the ability to visualize my thoughts through word clouds and mind maps.

**3.5.2. Pilot Study**

The purpose of the pilot study was to test the design of the interview protocol, my ability to conduct semi-structured interviews and use the Nvivo software. I chose the thematic analysis approach in order to be able to categorize each candidate’s answers on specific topics around the area of how they use social media and YouTube as an instruction and emotional support instrument regarding special education issues. The instrument chosen was semi-structured interviews which I later translated, transcribed and inserted in Nvivo software in order to be coded using nodes.

I initially felt that one interview, in order to have some results connected to my research, was adequate. However the first candidate was proven, during the interview, to be not a keen Facebook user despite his initial statement that he was. I continued and executed the interview process, however, I realized that I needed better screening tactics for my sampling and a second participant for the pilot study. My second interview was more successful. I had already gained experience from my first attempt and I was very relaxed and amiable. My questions did not follow the order they were initially placed in, as I rarely consulted the protocol due to the flow of the discussion. I let the participant speak and my interventions were scarce. The interview process lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and it was recorded in my laptop. An information sheet and consent form were given, explained and signed before the interviews.

**3.6. Ethical Considerations**

Validity

The validity of this study would definitely have been more enhanced using observation or documentation as an additional data analysis method in the world of Facebook and YouTube. However, there are certain legal and ethical aspects considering the data obtained through these methods. Despite the fact that Facebook and YouTube are considered public and semi public (Stutzman et al.2012) according to the European Union legislation their content is considered personal and sensitive and the collection of any Data coming from these sources, even without any personal information being visible, must comply with the university ethics guidelines. In addition there seems to be confusion as to what is considered sensitive personal information and what is not (Benchmann, 2014). The small time frame of the study was also a preventive factor do realize an accurate and valid online research following the ethical guidelines. According to Mann and Stewart (2004) researchers’ observation without the permission of the observant may cause ethical issues. However that has not been clarified yet. That contradicts to concept where social media, Facebook and YouTube in particular, is based on, which is nothing more than observation and exposure. Their existence lies in exposing the lives of the members registered .it is therefore a paradox to be ethical limitations that confine and inexhaustible and valuable source of data that construct social reality that goes unnoticed.

Taking these implications into considerations I avoided the Internet/ virtual ethnography methodology approach which is based on observation within social media and focused on a broad quality approach using thematic analysis for the interviews of active Facebook and YouTube teachers and the way they perceive this digital reality.

This methodology, however, does not diminish the validity of my study since the sampling was chosen after careful selection and a very good knowledge of the participants’ professional use of Facebook and YouTube as part of the digital social reality and member of this new digital educational culture that promotes positivity, solidarity and sharing.

Approval

The University of Derby granted ethical approval for this study.

The research fully complied with the ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2004) based on the Data Protection Act (1998).

**CHAPTER 4**

**FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the analysis of two broader themes based on my research question related to secondary teachers’ resilience and self directed learning on SEND issues. However, three more theme emerged during the interviews, those of 21st teachers’ new identity and expectations, their isolation in their working environment that leads them to social networking and finally their concerns and expectations on the future impact of social media in education. A similarity of my findings can be found in Baker-Doyle’ (2011) as well as Carpenter and his colleagues’ (2016) studies, which state that social media can reinforce teachers’ resilience as well as their professional development through online professional learning communities. The latter also addresses the issue of isolation and lack of collegiality support, while a considerable amount of recent educational articles points out the redefinition of teachers’ role in a digital era.

**4.1 Redefining teachers’ role in a digital era**

One of the three major themes emerged from the interviews was the impact of social media, Facebook and YouTube on the re-definition of the teacher’s role in this information -based era, can be extremely beneficial to both teachers and students. Participants stress that technology has entered their daily lives, personally and professionally, and the denial of that intrusion could only lead to problems for teachers and students. All participants stated that instead of rejecting the Web.02 tools, they should embrace them and benefit from them. Despite their hesitations on the validity of social media they all acknowledge that teachers’ attitude need to be more positive and become digitally literate.

a. The ideal Teacher

All participants seemed to acknowledge that a teacher should possess the appropriate qualifications and attend the necessary seminars that could help him become a sufficient practitioner as well.

A common line of thought in all interviews, was that educators must adapt to the new information era and use the digital tools it provides to be accessible and engage their students, especially the special educational needs ones. It becomes evident that the teacher’s ability to combine everything provided, from traditional learning equipment to the new technological one, according to each student needs, is a skill the modern educator should possess.

They should also be able to take advantage of every available means that will enhance the quality of their teaching. Fay as well as the majority of the participants supported that teachers’ content knowledge should constantly updated through formal and informal academic qualifications. However, all the participants also added that academic knowledge should be combined with self –directed learning strategies through social and video sharing network communities (SNS/DLS) that project a visualization of this theoretical background especially to Special Education issues.

b.The researcher teacher

What characterizes that teacher is the constant self-development through research and observation.Teachers addresse the need for self-improvement through searching for information mostly on the Internet.

Another teacher considers the need for a well-informed teacher, imperative since students’ learning difficulties issues become more common and the number of children who cannot adjust to the traditional teaching methods, is increasing. She also considers Facebook and YouTube as the most useful source of information.

Some also believe that informing themselves on special educational issues is absolutely necessary for teachers to become effective in an inclusive classroom.

c.The Improviser Teacher

Teachers add one more characteristic: improvisation.

One of the educator interviewed expresses the overwhelming demands society expects from teachers. They are expected to constantly be able to adapt and improvise new pedagogical ways to engage all students, some to a great and others to a small extent. She mentions that this ability demands advanced critical skills which are the basis to creativity and innovation.

d.The social constructive Teacher

A common theme arising from the interviews was that efficient learning must emerge from constructing healthy bonds with their peers as well as students and their parents.

It was commonly acknowledged that learning happens intersubjectively through social and cultural interactions (Tirassa and Vallana 2010). Social media provide the environment in order for these interactions to grow and a new teachers’ role model to emerge, a teacher available and capable to transfer his knowledge to children of all abilities in an inclusive classroom. According to Jonassen (1996) technology, in the form of online interaction, can act as an “intellectual partnership” (Jonassen and Reeves, 1996, p.698) where learning happens through reflection. Reflection can be achieved through constant discussions - therefore the knowledge is constructed through constructive interactions in the digital environment of social media, Facebook and YouTube, in particular.

**4.2 Isolation vs Social media**

A second major theme involved teachers’ isolation as a reason for using social media as a source of professional growth and encouragement Although geographical limitations were also mentioned by a few, the lack of solidarity and the teachers’ feelings of being inadequately prepared to teach an inclusive classroom were the most predominant.

Lack of solidarity among teachers that work in the same environment or geographical area was presented as an obstacle to effective face to face interactions in order to increase the quality of their teaching. One of the educators, as an inexperienced one, entered a classroom without being warned about one of the student’s specific behavioural pattern that needed a particular way of treatment. The parents of the student refused to accept the problem and there was no formal diagnosis or guidance for the teacher or any other teacher of that school to follow. She was unable to handle one incident that came up and she describes how she felt after the incident took place:

The teacher had to resort to Facebook and its online support communities both to get the emotional support she did not receive from her school colleagues and also YouTube to get the practical knowledge and necessary information on how to treat that specific student in the absence of formal diagnosis and guidance.

To the question “why do you believe teachers resort to social media for professional advice and support instead of addressing their colleagues in their working environment?” the majority answered that insecurity for their qualifications and the fear of being characterized as inadequate and hence professionally rejected, might be one reason.

However, the current subjects seem to be in favour of a constructive learning approach and they prefer social face-to-face interactions as the best option considering their professional development however there is a consensus that inadequacy, insecurity and lack of solidarity promote feelings of professional isolation.

**4.3 Facebook and YouTube as teachers’ self-directed learning on SEND issues.**

The third major theme was related to teachers’ feeling of practical knowledge and inadequacy towards SEND issues.When asked whether they believe their academic knowledge is adequate enough to allow them to function effectively in an inclusive classroom all interviewees were adamant that it is not. While this response was expected, what was more surprising is that not even post graduates studies in special education provided the necessary practical knowledge for mainstream teachers to work with children of all abilities. Most of the subjects had post graduate degrees in special education however they supported that the knowledge they received was on theoretical basis and not practical and two had to attend a significant number of specialised seminars to familiarise themselves with the cases they had to address in the classroom. Talking about this issue, participants stated that what it was necessary for them was a visual representation of a solution of a problem. They addressed their need to witness real cases and how trained teachers dealt with the issues that can emerge in an inclusive classroom. They all admitted that although their first concern was to address a special educator and review the diagnosis’ guidance, when it was available, this also proved to be inadequate and they resorted to using Facebook and YouTube as a way to be self educated on practices and innovative teaching techniques to engage students with learning issues. These practices derived from the improvisation of other teachers who were willing and generous enough to share them on Facebook and YouTube.

Through Facebook teachers are informed about each other’s interests and level of knowledge and communicate less hesitantly than any other way of communication for advice. The exchange of information digitally is easier and faster.

YouTube is used a s a way for teachers to understand the reason behind Special Educational needs some of the students show. They admitted their first motive to use YouTube was curiosity. They wanted to see actual practical knowledge in real life situation so that they could incorporate it in the classroom more efficiently.

A common belief is that through Facebook and YouTube the teachers were able to focus and search specific issues of their interest, and the people who would ideally work well with.

A teacher who was sharing his work on Facebook inspired Debra. He made videos of each Iliad rhapsody using auditory and visual stimulation, in this case classical music background in combination with self made paintings of each act in the rhapsody. She contacted him, congratulated him on his work and befriended him in order to exchange information, knowledge and advice. She also commented that the incorporation of this technique in the class was very successful and all students even the weaker ones were engaged in the learning process.

Most interviewees admitted that their first attempt to get informed was to contact a special teacher however they were not helped enough and resorted to Facebook pages and YouTube videos.

Fay especially pointed out the importance of parents’ testimonies through Facebook and YouTube. She found those most helpful in understanding dyslexia and autism spectrum.

One of the teachers found how to use a fidget spinner as a time management tool .She found the idea on a Facebook video post where the test indicated to adjust the spinner at the top of the page, spin it and finish the exercise by the time the spinner stops spinning.

Another teacher mentioned that she found the assimilation videos on dyslexia, ADHD, extremely helpful in order to develop her empathy levels and understand what their students experience in class in order to find a way to eliminate any possible tantrums and make the learning process easier.

Οne of the teachers interviewed points out the lack of books with practices about learning difficulties issues. She reports that while there are plenty theoretical books there were no practical ones; therefore there was no other way to get informed about her autistic student but the internet and particularly Facebook groups on autism as well as YouTube. Half of teachers also consider YouTube a reliable source since the people have actually experienced those issues.

Another’s teacher curiosity of getting familiar with PECCS system led her to seek information in online professional communities and watch YouTube videos that demonstrate how the system works. She points out that social media gave her the drive to attend specialized seminars that could certify her as a PECCS practitioner.

**4.4 Teachers’ resilience and Social media**

Three codes analysed below constitute the theme of teachers’ resilience.

**4.4.1 Facebook and YouTube as teachers’ emotional pillars.**

What becomes evident from this study is that teachers find comfort in social media. Through their participations in Facebook educational groups and YouTube channels, they are able to witness that other teachers from all around the world experience similar issues especially in an inclusive classroom where children with different abilities have to co- exist. It is therefore expected for a teacher of mainstream education not to be able to address all students’ needs causing the effect of burnout. The sample of this study admits that they had found themselves on the verge of burning out several times and what motivated them and encouraged them to proceed with their efforts to teach was the support received from Facebook and YouTube testimonies. All participants seem to drain a psychological power from all the elements exposed on social media: from a motivational quote accompanied by a picture (meme) to a discussion on the comments section where a number of willing colleagues who had experienced and overcame the same issue, came to rescue.

Some of the teachers interviewed describe social media as a “discharge mechanism” where they can express their problems to other professionals who are able to understand her and relief her stress. She explains how she compares her day to other teachers’ and how through witnessing their written or verbal testimonies she tries to find solutions and support. She points out that this digital environment does not make her feel antagonized or threatened as her working environment does.

The word “failure” has been used almost by all the participants and it can be inferred that until the point they realized they were not the only teachers that faced the same issues, they had been feeling completely inadequate and incompetent. However Facebook and YouTube as provides them with an overwhelming amount of similar cases such as theirs and relieves any feeling of insecurity and professional low self esteem.

A large number of the teachers’ interviewd also feel lucky they are able to receive the support she does not get at school on Facebook.Almost all participants mentioned that social media, Facebook and YouTube, are not bound by time or location. The responses to a problem are instant from teachers all around the world and the perspectives on the possible problems through responses are abundant. YouTube, in addition, offers the visual representation of the problem. Actual cases, real people with disabilities express their point of view by addressing all kind of audiences. Teachers get the perspective they seek to increase their empathy levels and gain the experience and knowledge they need to be as resilient as they can in an inclusive classroom.

**4.4.2 Befriending parents and students on Facebook and Teachers’ resilience increase**

The study has indicated so far that teachers’ attitude towards Facebook and social media is beneficial towards establishing healthy social connection between them, their students and parents. This need for communication becomes more imperative for both teachers and family when the students experience learning difficulties. However in order to succeed keeping the balance teachers are very careful when using it. Abi avoids exposing her personal life to her students so she keeps them in a restricted list; nevertheless she uses it as a way of promoting her work and communicating with them since she considers the fastest way to access them when it comes to homework or scheduling lessons. She has noticed that all her students are always online and available on Facebook than any other way of communication. The majority also supports how useful communicating through Facebook can be in helping the students organizing their homework and activities and promoting soft skills such as team work. Debra, although she does not befriend her students in her personal account to avoid getting “bombarded with questions”, she is operating the school’s one and she believes that the promotion of students’ team projects through Facebook posts and the manifestation of positive comments for their work, engage students, especially those with learning difficulties, and boosts their confidence. Teachers also gain confidence and encouragement through the online approval and positive commentaries of their colleagues, students and their parents.

Most teachers believe that teachers should be accessible to their students and reveals their human side to them in order to bond with them and engage them into learning.Being accessible to her students gives her the hope that her students will be able to empathize with her and her effort to satisfy their learning individual needs.

**4.4.3.The importance of peer-mentors in Social Networking Sites**

Almost all the participants testify that they followed Facebook pages or groups and YouTube channels of other teachers’ whose personality and professional work admire.

Conclusion

The importance of this evidence is extremely significant. From the participants statements it becomes apparent that the online social environments provide the emotional support they need and create the feeling of belonging to a community, which share the same problems and concerns. The participants were in search of mentors to whom they could identify with. Finally the social interactions through Facebook with parents and students reinforce their resilience through positive feedback and reduce the risk of burn out.

**4.5.The impact of SNS (Facebook and YouTube) and Future Implications.**

**4.5.1. Future implications**

The majority of the participants believe that the quality and reliability of the Facebook groups and YouTube channels should be taken into consideration. They hope that in the future social media will obtain a more professional role in the discipline. Debra also emphasizes the teachers’ maturity in using Facebook and YouTube wisely to convey messages and promote solidarity.

They state that the quality and credibility of the content of social media regarding SEN issues should be improve in the future in order to be more professional, effective and reliable.

All participants praised the positive effect on the teacher-student interactions. They believe that building bonds through online purposive interactions can reinforce the learning process and bring teachers together. They believe that social media can increase teachers’ reflective thinking and therefore the quality of their teaching.

**4.5.2 Teachers’ and students’ awareness and motivation through SNS on SEND issues**

Three participants also pointed out the motivational power of Facebook and YouTube especially as a way of promoting awareness on SEN issues. She believes that Social media give a voice to the people with Special Needs and it is a way to make people aware of the problems their families, teachers and mostly themselves face daily.

All the teachers interviewed emphasized the vast degree to which they were emotionally affected by these awareness videos and one of the participants admitted that a moving YouTube clip was the reason for pursuing further qualifications in Special Education.

Conclusion

The themes emerged from the interviews confirm the research questions and objectives of this study. Teachers are convinced that in order to be adequate at their profession, they need to be digitally literate and engage in social networks where they can acquire peer advice on practical learning techniques through YouTube that could work in inclusive classrooms. Moreover, teachers’ need positive feedback from peer to peer interactions, mostly online since they feel isolated and ignored in their working environment. In addition, teachers use online communities and Facebook as a way to convey messages to their students and provide awareness on SEND issues. In some cases, Facebook posts and YouTube awareness videos led teachers’ pursue further training in Special Education. Finally and most importantly, in regards to this study, teachers seem to become more resilient, inspired and motivated when interacting with their peers online. They use Facebook as a “discharge “mechanism where they can express their concerns or even passively observe others who confront the same problems. All participants were positive that Facebook and YouTube have great potential in education.

**CHAPTER 5**

**DISCUSSION**

The results of the present study suggest that teachers in mainstream education benefit to a great extent from using YouTube and Facebook as a source of self-directed professional development, emotional support and instruction. Their attitude towards SNSs is positive despite their concerns to their proper use, reliability and teachers’ digital literacy. The data are broadly consistent with the initial research questions and literature review. More specifically:

**5.1 Redefining teachers’ roles**

Due to the increasing number of existing papers on the impact of social media to teachers’ knowledge and identity, the theme of redefining the educators’ role in the 21st century was expected. All participants agreed that the academic knowledge they obtain after graduating and during their professional academic development are limited to theory and are not helpful to the real classroom cases. This view is confirmed by Lieberman and Mace (2010) who separate practitioner knowledge to professional knowledge, which is very accurate in the case of mainstream education where teachers, especially the novice ones, are required to perform in large inclusive groups of students with no practical knowledge on SEND issues.

The impact of technology and SNSs in teachers’ identity and expectations was also another important finding consistent with the previous literature. The participants state that even practical or professional knowledge is not enough in inclusive environments. The 21st century teachers are expected to possess a great range of skills that at some point becomes unrealistic and overwhelming (MacBlain & Purdy, 2011) These skills are related not only to cognition but also metacognition and critical thinking, connected to classroom management, improvisation, communication skills, empathy and learning through reflection and dialogue, skills they claim, develop at some degree, through their involvement in Facebook and YouTube. This is also consistent with the Constructivist paradigm in education that promotes learning through social networks depicted in Ellis’ (2007), Prensky’s (2006), Knowles (1975), Mezirow (1998), Kolb (2015) among others’ studies, already examined in the literature section.

A surprising finding, however, was the role of teachers as improvisers. All participants defined outstanding teachers as the ones who are able to adapt and improvise in order to engage all students in inclusive classrooms. They believe that this skill can be developed through social interactions and observation through Facebook and YouTube. This view coincides with Sorensen’s study, which claims that improvisation is an essential part of teachers’ expertise and can be constructed socially. Although Sorensen does not mention SNSs as a means to develop these skills, it can be assumed that social networks ‘concept are based on social interactions and can act against teachers’ isolation.

**5.2 Teachers Isolation vs Social Media**

The findings also support previous studies’ claims on issues of teachers’ isolation, exclusion, inadequacy to cope with SEND students as well as lack of cooperation and collegiality. Those topics were addressed by the participants as reasons for engaging in Facebook and YouTube communities. Participants had experienced themselves a kind of isolation and exclusion. Their ideas were not taken into consideration nor did their opinions. While most of the teachers regarded the unwillingness of teachers’ cooperation as a form of antagonism, two expressed a different perspective. They believed that the reason behind this unwillingness is insecurity.

Mainstream teachers are insecure about their adequacy and they do not wish anyone to know. Therefore, they refuse to cooperate with special educators especially when there is no clear guidance on the role each teacher should have to avoid misunderstandings. This is also reinforced by Dreyer and Lorna, (2013) as well as Keefe and Moore,(2003) who recognise that the new teachers especially are more prone to abandon the profession due to lack of respect and attacks to their confidence. This contradicts Sveto’s et.al theory that the teachers born after 1990 are considered digital natives and are more confident with modern pedagogies, however the experienced teachers insecurities shatters that confidence. The participants themselves expressed their disappointment over this inability to gain from experienced ones and tired from the constant pursue of development training that still offers them no practical knowledge.

**5.3 Facebook and YouTube as teachers’ self-directed learning on SEND issues**

All the participants were fully motivated and committed to their profession. They had obtained postgraduate degrees as well as plenty of certificates. However, they still feel inadequate when facing a SEND student. They all witness that watching YouTube videos or Facebook posts and videos posted by their peers mostly from other countries, they get inspired and motivated. They use these ideas and most of them seem to have been successful in that. Unfortunately, although there is a great amount of literature on using YouTube as an instruction tool within a class, there is not enough studies, to my knowledge, on how SNSs can contribute to teachers’ self directed education. Although YouTube is broadly used in classrooms the academic world does not consider it reliable enough to count as a way of self-directed education. On the other hand emerging studies in medicine regard it as an excellent tool towards SDL.

Arnold and Paulus (2010) regard SNSs as forms of experiential learning (Kolb, 2015). Morrison and Premkumar (2014) as well as Raikos and Waidyasekara (2013) in the field of medicine consider YouTube as a valuable tool towards students self directed education and a means to develop the critical abilities they are required to search online and find the appropriate content. The literature and the participants, though, both stated the lack of reliability in YouTube and Facebook videos, however all stated that training and digital literacy could resolve this issue.

**5.4 Teachers’ resilience and Social media and future implications**

Resilience was one of the major themes in this study along with professional development. The number of teachers leaving the profession is increasing. More and more teachers find it hard to fulfil all the expectations we mentioned above or deal with their peers’ insecurities.

This finding is completely consistent with Carpenter and his colleagues’ study (2017), which recognises teachers’ high risk of burnout due to feelings of isolation and stress, and introduces social online communities as a remedy to this issue. Facebook as an online community connects people socially and it was very interesting to find out that teachers who decided to befriend their students on Facebook were more confident due to the positive feedback they received, mostly in the form o emoticons. This exchange of appreciation from both sides online and its benefits to teachers’ resilience has not been addressed in literature and it has not received yet enough attention for academic research.

The participants, although disappointed with the current situation in education, were extremely motivated and willing to stand up for what they believe. Isolated from their working environment, they admitted that Facebook and YouTube were a discharge mechanism for them. There was no time frame to ask advice since Facebook and YouTube are always available, cost effective and with a wide range of videos and groups. All the participants admitted that Facebook and YouTube, at some extent, affected their emotional state, positively.

Facebook and YouTube’s future implications have been mentioned throughout the study several instances. Lippest (2008) quotes Children International’s statement that ‘teachers may be unaware of the potential Facebook can have in education”. All the participants acknowledged the importance of Facebook when it is used wisely and when teachers are digitally related to engage in that. Facebook, unlike the other online platforms that were later created for purely academic reasons, like Edmodo and Ning, was based on the concept of social interactions among friends; however, since it is the most popular with 2.9 million monthly users it can reach all population among them teachers. So, like any other mean of mass media, it can act as a subliminal stimulus towards raising SEND awareness, motivating, inspiring people and reforming education.

This is quite evident in Isabels’ and Abis’ testimonies where they stated that they were so moved from the YouTube videos distributed through Facebook as well as the graphic content with the meaningful puns (memes) that were motivated into following a career in Special Education and became more sensitive and empathetic to SEND students.

Another important finding is the importance of mentoring and peer networking through Facebook and YouTube on teachers’ professional development and resilience. Almost all participants stated that they followed other teachers or educational counsellors as a source of inspiration and emotional support. Debra, for instance, was so inspired by the work of a teacher posted on Facebook, that she decided to contact her and form an actual online successful collaboration. Although there are studies in teachers’ mentoring and coaching, little attention has been given in online peer networking and mentoring. Rhodes and Beneicke (2002) .for example, stress the importance of peer mentors in school networks however I was unable to find literature on how Facebook and YouTube provide the teachers’ role models necessary to advocate for Special Education and educational issues in general.

**CHAPTER 6**

**CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study was to add to this body of literature and remedy the obvious gap in this area with regards SEND pupils and the mainstream teacher’s experience of using social media. A qualitative approach was adopted using the method of thematic analysis. The study has provided insights on the reasons behind SNSs’ use, and the positive influence in teachers’ well being. It has also identified the need for teachers’ digital literacy and Facebook and YouTube’s reliability as a valuable source of information and resilience. Although this was a small-scale exploratory study, I believe that the high level of consistency in the findings and the remarkable consensus among participants make it a prominent one.

**Limitations**

Although this research was carefully prepared, I am still aware of its limitations and shortcomings. First of all, the research was conducted in a short period of time with a small number of participants and at a particular level of education (secondary). The sampling process was time consuming since I wanted to have the perfect sampling however a larger scale research would involve an important range of teachers from all educational levels, recruited from the most popular Facebook groups and pages as well as YouTube channels. This would have perhaps increased the validity of the research.

In addition, what I had to tackle, as a novice researcher in the social media and education field was the lack of statistical evidence. I had no data on just how many users are teachers or special educators, neither how many teachers’ and special educators’ groups and pages on education exist. At the lack of this statistical evidence I could only assume the amount of the teachers by the numbers of each page and YouTube channel I visited during my research.

The lack of relevant literature in the area of social media and special education in conjunction with my inexperience as a novice researcher was also of concern. However, the pilot study proved to be a valuable experience of data collection within the chose method.

Finally, since the research was conducted by myself it is possible a certain degree of subjectivity to exist. However, with the intervention of my supervisor, I believe an adequate degree of reflexivity has been ensured.

**Further research**

Further research is needed in conducting studies, qualitative or quantitative, in social media environments.

Firstly, due to the unclear and uncharted territory of ethics in research, I believe, that the scientific world needs to further evaluate the importance of valuable data. Few researches on Ethics in social media, have been conducted however there is not a clear guidance on collecting data from networked communities.

Secondly, as a result the issue of privacy needs to be taken into account. Although, peoples’ privacy must be respected, the question raised is whether there is privacy in social media environments. I believe that there can be no privacy especially when the personal content is posted in public mode.

Thirdly, the voices of billions of people of different backgrounds, educational, cultural, social of all ages are vivid testimonies that can be used in qualitative studies. Though these networked communities’ researchers can reach samplings that would be impossible to have access to, otherwise. Social media are everyday interactions that are based mostly on individuals’ impulsive behaviour. Therefore ignoring this research treasure available and accessible just at a click of a button is a terrible loss in the area of research.

Lastly, in the area of Special education and social media there seems to be no investigation, at my knowledge, which examines SEND children’s’ parents’ need to expose their daily challenges on YouTube, Facebook or any other form of social media. No research, as far as I know, has been made on children’s’ need with special needs, to be exposed on social media and the Ethics behind it. The case of a ten-year old You Tuber who suffers from Progeria and a severely autistic boy who recently died, are examples among others for further investigation.

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