



Student Teachers Promoting Democratic Engagement Using Social Media in Teaching

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Peer-reviewed article; received 09 June 2018; accepted 10 December 2018

Abstract

In this study, we address how student teachers can facilitate democratic engagement in school. The democratic engagement is seen through the lenses of an increasingly digital world through which both teachers and children live in. 42 third-year student teachers systematically prepared to use social media as an illustrative pedagogical tool in their practice placement period. By using the notions of “thin” and “thick” democracy, we are analyzing student teachers’ understanding of democracy and democratic engagement. Our findings suggest that the students view democracy in a thin way, and this lack of democratic competence may influence their classroom practices as future teachers. The Council of Europe’s Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture was used to analyse the student teachers’ competence to connect the use of social media as a digital and pedagogical tool in promoting democratic engagement. The findings disclose that students vary in their capacity to make use of social media when promoting democratic engagement. In our closing discussion, we argue that these results, primarily, pose serious challenges for teacher education.

Keywords: democratic education; democratic engagement; teacher education; digital citizenship; social media

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Introduction

In this article, we explore Norwegian student teachers' (i.e. students who attend the teacher education program) ability to promote *democratic engagement*² in school, particularly through social media. The research question posed in this study is: *What characterizes student teachers competence of democratic engagement using social media in teaching?* As such, we explore how democracy, a core value in Norwegian schools and society, is developed through social media as digital tools, and, hence, promoting core 21st century competencies (cf. Voogt & Roblin, 2012).

In this article, we use democratic engagement as a basis of democracy, which can denote the core values for democratic practice and professional development (Shaw & Crowther, 2013). As our study has the promotion of democratic engagement as its core, the use of digital media will not be assessed as a digital competence or technological expertise as such. Rather we put emphasis on how the use of digital tools are, or can be, enablers, promoters or mediators of democratic engagement.

The context of this study is the field of digital citizenship education, focusing on how democracy and digital competence are combined in educational practice. The use of digital technologies is judged a distinguishing feature of digital citizenship (Frau-Meigs et al., 2017; Carretero et al., 2017; Parker & Fraillon, 2016), a kind of democratic citizenship spearheaded in contemporary Norwegian education. The increased possibilities for strengthening digital networks and establishing new connections, locally, nationally and globally, have expanded. Thus, neither the individual citizen nor society is restricted to the context of the nation-state (Dahlgren, 2009; Jorba & Bimber, 2012). In everyday life people live in a so-called “digital world”, where digital technology is used in mundane activities. One could say that the introduction of internet and social media have paved the way for a citizen-centered perspective on democracy (Loader & Mercea, 2011). Digital media promotes and facilitates a process of transnational connections as well as being used by individuals as a mechanism to connect and engage with other individuals in what we can call a modern *polis*. In this modern polis, the digital media are means of a variety of civic actions, for example, the use of social media to raise social criticism (Stottard, 2014, p. 1). Digital media increases individual choices, possibilities of engagement, and provides multiple arrays of information sources (Mason 2015; Sunstein, 2007). Democratic and digital citizenship education is at the core of societal development in the recent international educational policies (e.g. Frau-Meigs, O’Neill, Soriani & Tomé, 2017; Carretero, Vurokari & Punie, 2017; Parker & Fraillon, 2016). Digital tools, internet, and

² The Norwegian concept *demokratisk deltakelse* would usually translate to *democratic participation*, which in English may signify political participation and governance, activities through formal bodies and activities such as voting in elections. Another relevant concept in English is *civic engagement* which would denote activities from the individual citizen moving beyond voting, for example through engaging in improving the local environment. To make the concept readable and understandable in both English and Norwegian, we have chosen to use the phrase *democratic engagement*.

social media³ are in high demand in terms of educating citizens who are informed and understand their formal responsibilities combined with an ability to make use of internet and social media (cf. Council of Europe & Pestalozzi Programme, 2013; Parker & Fraillon, 2016). This is particularly visible in the debate about 21st century skills in which the potential of ICT to facilitate learning of needed competencies, included democratic citizenship, is prominent (cf. Voogt & Roblin, 2012). Furthermore, in the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) 2013 it researchers argue that acquiring and mastering ICT skills has become a major component of citizens' education (Frailon, Ainley, Schulz, Friedman & Gebhardt, 2014, p. 3). Likewise, OECD (2016, p. 5.) maintain applying digital competence to a globalized context requires a number of democratic competences; such as handling intercultural issues critically and from multiple perspectives, to understand how differences affect perceptions, judgments, and ideas of self and others, and to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with others from different backgrounds.

Promoting democracy and democratic engagement are also firmly entrenched in the Norwegian Education Act (Ministry of Education and Research, 1998) and in the National Curriculum (Ministry of Education and Research, 2004). Digital competence, defined as “understanding the complex relationships between individuals, organizations, ICT and society” (Søby, 2015, p. 5), is a central element in the National Curriculum. Digital competence serves a double function, both as a core education policy concept and as an objective of development in school (Søby, 2015). Digital skills are judged as one out of five basic skills fundamental to learning and as a prerequisite for a student to display competence and qualifications relevant in school, work life and society (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2012). Norwegian teachers are expected to have capacity to maneuver in this modern era and empower new generations to take possession of their role as citizens. As teacher educators, we want to investigate to what extent our teacher education has contributed to cultivate appropriate capabilities among student teachers.

To promote democratic values and ways of living, and connecting to the digital world as responsible, global citizens is then seen as a crucial task in education. The student teachers of this study will become teachers for future generations, and their understanding of democracy and democratic engagement affect their professional actions. To promote and develop digital citizenship, teachers need to understand the demands in the policies and national curricula within both the field of democracy and the field of digital skills and being able to combine them in a meaningful way in their teaching. Thus, there is a need to see what characterized their combined competences of democratic engagement using digital tools.

³ Social media is here understood as Internet-based tools and services in which you create a profile, build a network and grow that network (Marichal, 2012, p. 3). In addition, extensive collaboration in generating content, distribution and sharing in different shapes and forms take place through social media (Krokan, 2012, p. 25). This interactive or collaborative nature of these tools makes them social.

In this article, we will first provide a theoretical discussion of democracy and digital citizenship education, as well as a relevant review of empirical research literature. Then we will give an overview of the methodological considerations of the study before we present the results about teacher students' display of democratic engagement when using social media in teaching.

Theoretical approach and empirical research on digital citizenship education

In this study, we explore the field of digital citizenship education with an emphasis on democratic engagement in the use of digital tools, particularly social media. Democratic engagement and digital citizenship education make up a wide phenomenon with a number of policies and practices. Democracy itself can be considered a socially constructed phenomenon, denoting a number of practices of civic society and dependent on human interaction for its existence (Searle, 1995). In an ideal state of governance, democracy is to guarantee citizens' equality, certain freedoms and the opportunity of participation in decision-making in the public sphere (cf. Barber, 1984/2003).

We distinguish between the notions of thin and strong democracy. A thin democracy is, in Barber's arguments, "a politics of static interest" (Barber 1984/2003, p. 24), a form of governing society. Although a decrease in traditional democratic participation, such as voting in elections, is visible in several countries, democracy cannot simply be assessed through this indicator (Dahlgren, 2009). A strong, or thick (Zyngier, 2012) democracy, however, is a perspective on democracy as an idea of a community of citizens who can manage to live together despite different interests, engaged in mutual actions due to a common set of civic attitudes (Barber 1984/2004, p. 117-120). The ways in which a teacher understands a democracy, as thin or thick, influences how s/he teaches democracy in school and what kind of democratic citizen s/he aims to promote through his/her work. Thus, democracy is not a static phenomenon (voting, elections), but part of actions and social practices. Thus, democratic engagement is a fruitful term.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004a; 2004b) have developed a framework of three categories from asking the question of how, within each category, a citizen would be expected to behave to be seen as a good citizen. This could also be seen as examples of competences as it provides examples of items on democratic engagement. *A personally responsible citizen*, they hold, has a focus on obeying laws, paying taxes, recycling and acting responsibly by helping people in crisis. *A participatory citizen* moves beyond these traits. A participatory citizen engages on behalf of the community. S/he seeks knowledge about how the system works and establish strategies to engage in political decision-making to promote change. *A justice oriented citizen* supplements participation with critical inquiry and the willingness to address areas of injustice and stimulate systemic change. In addition, such a citizen knows how to involve other citizens, organizations and (here also digital) media in order to achieve the wanted outcome (see also Westheimer, 2015).

As technology permits a reorganization of space, social relations and, hence, conversation or deliberation, the internet, and new digital social spheres can be defined as a contemporary *agora* or public sphere. Individual autonomy is frequently attainable through societal processes currently enabled by new technologies (ibid.). Technology, in other words, allows individuals to propose new spaces—an agora—for politics. The emerging model of the digitally enabled citizen is liquid and reflexive to contemporary civic realities but also removed from civic habits of the past (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 19). Traditional engagement with voting and political party membership is still significant in a democracy, but not the ways in which a citizenry necessarily engage in democratic activities. Loader and Mercea (2011, p. 762) argue that collective and democratic action “is growing new roots”. Social media, for example, can make a citizen-journalist and accelerates the speed of many kinds of communication and flows of information (Jorba & Bimber, 2012, p. 17; Sevincer, Biseth & Vaagan, 2018). Social media is competing with media organizations such as television, radio, and newspapers. Loader & Mercea (2011) argue that the potential of social media for democracy can be described as a potential of mass-participation and for the citizens to seize power to shape social relations. The language of power is visible on several arenas, not only Facebook as such, but include the sphere of digital media, which can be termed “networked media” (Loader & Mercea, 2011).

An argument when discussing the level of democratic engagement in a digital world can be that socio-cultural factors can have more transformative power than the technical digital competence of an individual. There is no need to be an expert in a number of digital technology prior to using it. The way digital media develops makes public spaces accessible to a large audience. This implies also that social diversity, inequality, and cultural difference are important aspects of power influencing democratic innovation through digital media. In other words, digital media must be considered a field of power. Thus, we contend that experimentation with new technologies represents democratic opportunities. Creativity and innovation are equally important qualities for civic engagement. Democratic innovations are visible when citizens devise new ways of making their presence felt (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). Jensen, Jorba and Anuiza (2012, p. 6) argue that competence in the use of digital media is important in order to handle these tools in political participation. Jensen et al. (ibid.) hold that the lack of imagination and innovation in the use of digital media for democratic engagement may indicate lack of political engagement from the outset. We, therefore, hold that a digital competent teacher can perhaps have an increased political capacity, with more pedagogical tools for active citizenship and the capability of facilitating a learning environment promoting democratic engagement.

The Council of Europe (2016) has suggested a conceptual elaboration of “democratic competences”. In their “Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture” (henceforward, CDC Framework 2016), democratic competence can be seen in the intersection between values, knowledge and critical understanding, skills and attitudes. Values

comprise for dignity, diversity, and democracy, Attitudes include openness, respect and responsibility, and self-efficacy. Skills are described as analytical skills, empathy, cooperation, communication and conflict solving, while knowledge and critical understanding are exemplified by knowledge and critical understanding of the self, of language as well as the world. Frau-Meigs et al. (2017, p. 63) underline this framework also as an important part of *digital* citizenship education. In the analysis, we will, therefore, use this framework as a discussion partner towards the conceptualizations of democratic engagement of teacher students using digital tools.

A review of research literature on democracy, digital tools, and education⁴ shows that there is little explicit empirical research on student teachers' competence of democratic engagement using digital tools and social media in teaching, either in Norway or internationally. Democracy and digital competence as separate fields in education and in teacher education, on the contrary, are vast areas of research. Empirical research on digital tools in education that seeks to promote democratic values seems to cluster in four kinds of research: A first field, are empirical studies bringing forth a specific pedagogical conceptualization of digital tools. Pedagogical accounts on education underline that digital tools are not only practical means but an intrinsic part of the learning processes, formation and meaning-making (e.g., Letnes, 2014; Hauge, Lund & Vestøl, 2007). Lund, Furberg, Bakken and Engelién (2014) develop an approach to professional digital competence as integration of both knowledge of how to use technology in the classroom and link it to pedagogy, subject content, and subject didactics. In other words, the digital competence should not be detached from content knowledge and pedagogy. A second field of research is the development of didactical models that not only aims at technical ICT skills but also reflects on complex pedagogical realities of teachers. One important example of this is the TPACK model⁵ developed by Koehler and Mishra (2009), often used to examine the integration of technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge (cf. Zinger, Tate and Warschauer, 2018). A third field of empirical studies focus on the level of digital competence in the field of practice. Gudmundsdottir and Hatlevik (2017) and Tømte, Kårstein and Olsen (2013) conclude that the quality of ICT education in Norwegian teacher education is poor. The development of *professional* digital competencies among new teachers is also only limited. In a recent article, Ottestad and Gudmundsdottir (2018) conclude that there is a need for increased evidence-based and systematic competence building on professional digital competence in education. However, they also call for a competence building when it comes to ICT competence in connection with lifelong learning and an increased emphasis on digital citizenship and digital responsibility. A fourth field of research problematizes and illuminates the challenges with the use of digital tools and social media. For instance, a study of the correlation between the level of

⁴ The keywords of literature search were combinations of democracy, democracy education, ICT education, digital citizenship and teacher education.

⁵ TPACK—A model identifying “the nature of knowledge required by teachers for technology integration in their teaching, while addressing the complex, multifaceted and situated nature of teacher knowledge.” <http://tpack.org/> Retrieved: 23.11.18.

democracy and the expansion of ICT tools in 133 countries, demonstrate a tendency that democratic freedoms and democracy are narrowed through, for example, filtering and the use of information cookies (Shirazi, Ngwenyama & Morawczynski, 2010).

Thus, in the field of digital citizenship education, there is a growing awareness that digital competence is not only a technical field but increasingly an integrative phenomenon involving several values and aspects of democratic engagement. However, the main conceptual development seems to be done on policy levels. In this landscape, we recognize a need for developing empirically based conceptualizations of the links between democracy and digital tools in education. We do so with a main emphasis on democratic engagement. Thus, our contribution is an explorative qualitative case study of teacher student's democratic engagement using digital tools and social media.

A qualitative case from Norwegian teacher education – methodological considerations

This study aims at bringing forward particular and context-dependent knowledge about the various student teachers' practiced and experienced democratic engagement using social media. In so doing, we bring forth analytical generalizations (Yin, 2009, p. 15, 38) of the complex relation of the development of professional competence in the intersection between democracy and digital tools. We apply a qualitative singular case research strategy, providing "the greatest possible amount of information on a given problem or phenomenon" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 77). The selection of this case study is one full cohort (42) of Norwegian student teachers in a Norwegian teacher education program for primary and junior high school. During the period of the study, the teacher students were doing teaching placement. The case from Norway is interesting as a so-called well-established democracy⁶ and a society with easy access to the internet and a diversity of digital tools. Most student teachers are in their twenties and many of them have used digital technology from a very early age. All have attended 10 years of compulsory education and a minimum of three years senior high school prior to enrolment in the teacher education program. The students were in their 6th semester (last semester of year 3) out of 8 semesters (4 years). These students are all digital literate, and many are well versed in the use of social media in their private spheres.

The data were collected as part of a preparation day (January 2013) for a practice placement period (four weeks) as well as a summarizing day of this placement period (February 2013). This placement period focused in particular on democracy in teaching, combined with the use of digital tools. The two days with the student teachers served as an intensified "hub" for teaching, discussing and reflecting on democracy in education.

⁶ Following the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index http://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy_index. Retrieved 23.11.2018

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The days for preparation and summarizing included short lectures on democracy (including the democratic mandate assigned in the legislation), democratic engagement, possible ways of promoting this through digital tools and social media. In addition, the student teachers engaged in group discussions of core concepts (democracy and democratic engagement) and developing of their own teaching plans, individual reflections, and reflection notes. The lectures and reflection notes do not have the status of a pre- or posttest along singular parameters but are rather used as qualitative thick descriptions (Pickering & Guzik, 2008) of conceptualizations of digital citizenship education. In order to bring as thick descriptions as possible, the data material for this study contains reflection notes, the teacher student's teaching plans for their practice placement and notes from group discussions. The student teachers were given a broad, open aim; to promote democratic engagement among pupils through the use of digital tools and social media in their regular teaching subjects. The teaching plans had to be relevant to a topic in the national curriculum of each teacher student's teaching subject and grade they were to teach and to focus on the development of democratic participation and digital, social media. At the same time, they had to include the use of digital skills by the use of social media and ensure the professional academic level of the school subject. The topics of the reflection notes were for instance *Reflect on your understanding of democracy* and *Reflect on where you find elements of democracy and use of social media in your teaching plan*. During the second study day, after the experience of teaching according to the plan, students reflected on and evaluated their own plans in a reflection note. The plans and all reflections notes were submitted to the researchers. The student teachers concurred that this material could be used for research purposes and the study is approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data. All information that could identify individuals and internship schools are anonymized.

The teacher student's teaching plans and all their reflection notes constitute the empirical data in our study. The empirical data was treated primarily with qualitative methods of analysis, but also a simple, quantitative word-count analysis was accomplished. The data was systematized according to thematic content analysis by several times of coding and categorizing (Gudmundsdottir, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We looked for thematic patterns as well as statements not fitting into the patterns (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In this way, the large amount of data was reduced and interpreted. In these processes, the data was sorted into four categories: 1) the students' descriptions of democracy, 2) the students' descriptions of democratic engagement, 3) the students' use of social media as a pedagogical tool, and 4) the students' descriptions of democracy in using social media as a pedagogical tool. The first two categories were analyzed as partly independent categories—and then compared to existing accounts of democracy, such as Westheimer and Kahne (2004a, 2004 b, 2015). The third and fourth category was first elaborated and then compared to the CDC Framework (2016). Altogether, the analysis provides new knowledge about teacher student's competence on democratic engagement using digital tools and social media.

In the following section, we present, analyze and discuss the results.

Manifestations of understanding of democracy and democratic engagement

The analysis is organized as two main themes in the data material: democracy and democratic engagement, social media as a digital, pedagogical tool. In this section, we present and discuss our findings on student teachers' understanding of democracy and democratic engagement.

In the reflection notes, the students wrote short texts about their understanding of democracy. All the words related to democracy were counted, and the results are illustrated in the word cloud below. The larger the font size, the higher is the frequency of the word in the reflection notes.

Figure 1. Students' understanding of democracy



Source: Students' reflection notes. All concepts are translated from Norwegian.

A first finding is that the students in this study described democracy as a political system. More than three times in average did each student use concepts related to this issue: *to vote*, *representative government*, *governance*, and *elections* (see also Biseth & Lyden, 2018; Wistrøm & Madsen, 2018). The students' choice of words illustrates the prominent understanding of democracy as relating to a political system, as in the ICCS studies (Mikkelsen, Buk-Berge, Ellingsen, Fjeldstad & Sund, 2001, Huang et al., 2017). The students were also mindful of crucial elements in democracy as a political system when pointing to the *rights* of citizens. Different descriptions of *rights* as *freedoms* were frequent, in average mentioned more than once in each reflection note, freedom of speech in particular and human rights in general. The students did not specify, but along the group discussions, this indicates coherence with knowledge of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). What seemed surprising was that none of the students, however, used concepts of freedoms and rights when developing and discussing their teaching plans. This could be seen as a lack of concretization of abstract notions of democratic

rights. However, the link between rights and democracy might not be obvious to the students. This implies on the one hand that they do not qualify as particular justice-oriented citizens, at least not according to the framework of Westheimer and Kahne (2004a, 2004b). It might also be that democracy is seen as the individual's degree of participation and of action, rather than necessarily an institutionalized, political understanding of democracy.

Two of the questions posed to the students were *How do you understand the concept democracy* and *How do you understand the concept democratic engagement?* In the reflection notes, it became apparent that the students were accentuating the rights of the citizens. *Co-determination* and *participation* were core concepts. The student teachers were concerned about all citizens in a democratic community having the freedom and possibility to be active participants in decision-making. They were concerned with *personal responsibility* (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b)—however without using responsibility as a concept (see figure 1). This could imply a narrow understanding of the obligations following the freedoms and rights in a democracy according to Barber (1984/2003) and Westheimer and Kahne (2004a; 2004b).

The analysis shows that the specific concepts used in the reflection notes were only to a limited degree dealt with in the teaching plans. It seemed less relevant for the students to apply their understanding of democracy in terms of rights and freedoms into their teaching plans and, hence, to the practical situation of teaching.

Another major description of democracy is the frequent use of *co-determination*. In the data, we find this when a group of students first described co-determination as an element in democratic education and afterwards operationalized it in the context of a pupils' role play as the pupils' "rights of determining how the role play should be going, how to fill the roles and decisions about the design of the side scenes" (Reflection note 2013-23-6: our translation). The pupils were allowed to take part in decision-making (here in a theater play), but it did not seem to be decisions about substantial questions with some kind of importance. This particular teaching plan did not specify any subject, merely describing a theater play as a method to teach about democracy and democratic engagement. This can indicate that the student teachers seem to judge the decision-making process *per se* as a democratic activity, even though the content itself might not appear as democratic activities to the pupils. These activities appear to illustrate a thin understanding of democracy, in terms of seeing democracy as a method and a singular act, but not as a tool for systematic engagement (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a; 2004b).

Several groups of students seemed to develop teaching plans on chosen themes within their subject and then add a session of voting. Students clearly perceive voting as an important democratic trait (see figure 1). Voting in itself, however, is only signifying a limited activity, not necessarily involving values and principles constituting a democratic way of life (Barber 1984/2003). When voting is the only democratic activity pupils are engaged in, they are not provided with the opportunity to learn what democracy as a way

of life implies (cf. Beane & Apple, 2007). The student teachers provided neither reflections on pupils' experiences of meaning with the activity or whether this in some way or another made an impact on the pupils' future engagement as democratic citizens. It seems as if the student teachers were not conscious about how to transform their understanding of democracy into meaningful, thick democratic activities in the classroom. Overall, this illustrates how the cognizance and reflection among the student teachers about the concepts of democracy and democratic engagement are rather thin (Barber, 1984/2003; Zyngier, 2012). We find that the students view democracy in a narrow and thin way. This lack of democratic competence will influence their classroom practice as future teachers.

Digital competence, social media- and the public agora negotiated

In this section, we will present the students' capability of using digital skills, being a prerequisite for using social media. Such democratic competence is part of participation in a new democratic agora (Papacharissi, 2010). Then we give an overview of the main findings of how social media were used as a pedagogical tool promoting democratic engagement. In so doing, the CDC Framework (2016) is used to interpret the performances of the participants in this study as visible through the reflection notes and in the submitted teaching plans.

The data material showed that the students used a variety of different social media in their teaching plans, such as Facebook, blog, Storify, and digital Learning Management Systems (such as Fronter, It's Learning, MLG), Skype, making blogs, logs, searching YouTube, internet papers, blogs, internet comment fields, forum, and campaign groups. Some presentations were developed digitally but were not published or shared digitally. In addition, the data illustrates how social media in various degrees has the pedagogical potential of promoting democratic engagement. A number of teacher students see social media as a source for developing pedagogical and digital skills, and not necessarily democratic engagement. Social media is described as a means of "increased knowledge", "varied methods", and "exciting learning method" to learn about democracy (Informant 14). This may be compared to Barber's thin understanding of democracy—seeing democracy as a static field to be properly communicated—and in this context, social media (Barber 1984/2003, p. 24). This implies that social media might be a didactical method aligned with any other method to promote democratic engagement.

A second group of students sees social media as a source for developing a number of new democratic understandings. Searching a number of different social media and internet sources, "the pupils can make complex texts about what racism is". (Informant 5). In this context, social media is used as a means to explore values, as described in the CDC Framework (2016, p. 40–41), but also as a source of critical knowledge (CDC Framework 2016, p. 53–54).

For a third group of teacher students, democracy is described as a source of profound democratic change. Informant 7 notes:

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This use [of social media] is expedient in terms of preparation and a practice of speaking in public later in life, to endure to be listened to, taking a stand and eventually pose questions with one's own utterances and to dare making one's own voice public.

This adheres to a possibility of social media to develop self-efficacy and communication with and among pupils (CDC Framework 2016, p.44–45) and might represent a step towards becoming a participatory citizen (Westheimer & Kahne 2004a, 2004b).

According to a number of students, the agora, the public open spaces, can be contested areas using social media. The students seem to develop different stances of the public spaces as sources for developing democratic engagement. These spaces represent both possibilities and profound challenges for the teacher students. When democratic engagement implies freedom of speech, social media is for instance described as a useful way to train communication skills (Informant 26), which can represent a communicative skill and method according to the CDC Framework (2016, p. 50–51). Another informant (7), however, describe social media also as a threat to the possibility of speaking freely and thus as existential and troublesome dimensions about being in a world of power: “Freedom of speech: That the public can thwart the individual's speech”. Thus, Westheimer and Kahne's (2004a, 2004b) justice-oriented citizen is not only a glamorous ideal, as it also bears on its threats.

Another central challenge of the internet is how to handle its rules—*the netiquette*, addressed by eight of the students. In general, netiquette is not specified. One informant contrasts freedom of speech to norms and rules when publishing articles on a blog:

Even though we have freedom of speech as a fundamental right, we still have to follow certain norms/rules to be a “socially accepted” and capable democratic citizen. The pupils should know the consequences if they don't comply with these norms when they write blog entries and responses. (Reflection note 2013-11-6: our translation)

This student is aware of the need to balance a democratic right, freedom of speech, with ethical considerations expressed in the concept of netiquette as a part of developing their pupils' democratic competencies. Another student describe netiquette as «consciousness about the recipients so that the exercise can be transferred to a 'real' public space, even though it is a closed arena in our plan” (Informant 07). Thus, netiquette is not only a question about specific rules and skills. Instead, it is a question about the realities the children are educated for and to.

This netiquette can be described as a development over time. The use of social media as a process of developing critical understanding to society and to public, digital spaces (Informant 20): “It is important that the pupils are well trained during Primary school to be critical to internet spaces”. This informant draws the conclusion that the teacher needs to select the sources of social media carefully. The same informant suggests that the teacher starts with “neutral” social media, such as a blog, and that the teacher blocks the blog from the open internet. This restricted stance, then, both reflects a care for protecting children, as well as seeing the need for a gradual and controlled introduction the access

to the open internet—as well as the public access to the pupil can refer to both a civic-minded attitude (CDC Framework 2016, p. 43–44).

A selection of students (2 groups of 4 students each) holds that schools should not be used as an arena of social media and that it should be kept separate from the school activities and purposes until the children reach a certain age. This could, on the one hand, be understood as a technical orientation towards laws and regulations, seeing social media as limited by age regulations (e.g. Facebooks age limit of 13). Another informant says:

I think that it is definitely not necessary that pupils should use Facebook, Twitter and these things at school. They spend too much time on that at home [...] It is more expedient to take a debate in the classroom. (Informant 20)

However, both the restricted use and the non-use of social media could also be understood as a critical stance towards exposing children to a world of social media powers, and also as a hindrance for “real” social communication. Thus, not using social media can also be defined as promoting certain democratic skills, such as those of listening and observing, or communicative skills (CDC Framework 2016, p. 48, 50–51). A restrictive stance towards social media can also exceed the skill dimension and be an existential matter of a child’s ideal development.

Closing discussion

In this study, we explore student teachers’ competence of democratic engagement using social media in teaching. The empirical material shows that the student teachers’ understanding of democracy largely can be described as a thin understanding. Additionally, the use of social media as a pedagogical tool seemed problematic at times. This became visible as the students expressed frustration in combining democratic engagement with the use of social media. Innovation and creativity, important qualities for civic engagement in this technological era (Coleman & Blumler, 2009), were only vaguely present in their first reflection notes. However, as the student teachers plan and reflect on the use of social media, their understanding of democracy might seem to develop and reveal a range of professional judgments about not only what democracy is, but how to promote democratic engagement among their pupils. This may give different conditions for these future teachers to facilitate and promote democratic engagement adapted to a new reality and move beyond civic habits of the past (Papacharissi, 2010). New ways of and places for democratic engagement are available in our societies, but the student teachers need support in exploring and investigating how these places can be used for democratic purposes in their work as future teachers. This is a task for us as teacher educators and something we should work to address. We are responsible for the provision of a learning space in teacher education where the individual teacher student can develop their civic virtues or areté (Papacharissi, 2010). As teacher educators, we need to question to which extent we make use

of new media as a force for democratic citizenship education, how we empower our student teachers' to deploy 21st century skills and make them capable of digital citizenship education.

For students who show a thin understanding of democracy, hence, their teaching plans contain an educational perspective on nurturing of personal responsible citizens (Barber, 1984/2003; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b). In the outset, we could be content with the student teachers being engaged with democracy at all. However, as democracy is seen as a core value in Norwegian society, we firmly believe that our educational system in general, and teacher education in particular, need to develop participatory and justice-oriented citizens in order to sustain and further develop democracy and society in the future. To have any hopes of promoting democratic engagement, it is pivotal for teachers to have the ability to engage pupils in meaningful democratic activities. Additionally, to promote democratic engagement in future justice-oriented citizens, teachers need an advanced, critical and thorough understanding of democracy. Included in such competencies, teachers need skills to act in an increasingly digital world.

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