# Chapter 46
# Students' Out-of-School Writing Practices in an Educational Facebook Application:
## The Case of Hot Dish

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## ABSTRACT

*In this chapter, the authors seek to help educators understand trends in students' writing outside of the classroom, with a particular emphasis on illuminating students' purposes and practices in writing within social media spaces. The authors synthesize current research on students' Internet and social media practices and offer a case study from their own research on students' writing within an educational Facebook application called Hot Dish. This chapter seeks to elucidate the reciprocal relationship between students out of school writing using popular social media and their in-school practices. Ultimately, the authors seek to help readers make connections between what students are doing with new media in their leisure time and the improvement of students' writing performance in K-12 settings, believing there may be important but under-explored synergies.*

## INTRODUCTION

*The New York Times* recently headlined a story that inquired: "If Twitter is a work necessity …" (Preston, 2012). The article argued that digital literacy is fast becoming a necessary skill as em-ployers seek employees with social media savvy. Increasingly ubiquitous access to the Internet and social media in schools, homes, and communities makes new forms of reading and writing possible, and these influence educators' desired competencies for learners and goals for learning, instruc-

tion, and future research (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009). Often used interchangeably with *Web 2.0*, the term *social media* refer to online applications that promote users, their interconnections, and user-generated content (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). Examples of social media are social network sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn®; video-sharing sites such as You-Tube®; and microblogging sites such as Twitter. In the United States, two-thirds of online adults (Smith, 2011) and three-quarters of online teenagers (aged 12–17) use social media (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Indeed, online social networking is the dominant form of out-of-school, leisure time computer-using activity among American teenagers (Kaiser, 2005).

Such trends have sparked debates among educators and others (Kist, 2005; National Council of Teachers of English, 2005; Rich, 2008) concerned with literacy education. On the one hand, popular media accounts warn that young people's media practices are deficient or harmful to academic learning, often linking them to a "moral panic about declining standards of literacy'' (Thurlow, 2006, para. 23) or a ''threat to societal values'' (Herring, 2007, p. 4). On the other hand, proponents argue for the importance of considering not just print-based literacies currently emphasized within schools, but also digital literacies shaped by new social practices:

*New technologies such as … social networking technologies and video- and music-dissemination technologies have rapidly spread, by means of the Internet, each with additional, new literacy forms and functions that are reshaped by social practices... literacy has now come to mean a rapid and continuous process of change in ways in which we read, write, view, listen, compose, and communicate information (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008, p. 5).*

As social media become significant and pervasive in most young people's lives, and their relationship with these technologies no longer formed primarily within school but in the domain of popular culture, educators must move beyond conventional views of these media as curriculum-delivery devices, teaching aids or ''neutral'' tools for learning (Buckingham, 2007, p. viii) to find ways of engaging with them more creatively as ways of *representing* the world, of *communicating,* and as *social* and *cultural* processes (Buckingham, 2007; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

The purpose of this chapter is to help educators understand trends in students' digital writing *outside* of the classroom, with a particular emphasis on illuminating students' purposes and practices in reading and writing within social media spaces. Toward this end we synthesize selected studies on students' out-of-school Internet and social media practices to highlight their potential relationships and implications for learning. We also offer a case study from our own research, looking at the out of school literacy practices of high school and college students in a Facebook application called Hot Dish. In this case study, we seek to make connections between students' social networking practices and recent position statements within U.S. standards-setting organizations such as the National Council for the Teaching of English (NCTE). Ultimately, we seek understand what students are doing with social media out of school and its relationship to the improvement of students' writing performance in K-12 settings, believing there may be important but under-explored synergies.

## BACKGROUND

Recent NCTE Policy Briefs suggest the convergence of in-school and out-of school literacy practices with new media (NCTE, 2011). NCTE's (2013) framework for designing, implementing, and assessing a literacy curriculum for the 21st century includes:

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