Appropriating Facebook : Enacting Information Literacies

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Appropriating Facebook
Enacting Information Literacies

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The aim of this paper is to describe and analyse the repurposing of Facebook into a tool for learning in teacher training, and how information literacies are enacted in the process.

The study is informed by a socio-cultural view on information literacy which implies that learning and literacies are situated, tool-based practices. An ethnographic study of a Facebook Group with two hundred Swedish teacher trainees and two educators is conducted. Five semi-structured interviews contextualize and validate the online material. 201 conversations from the Group during April and May 2012 are analysed using the theoretical concept appropriation and the empirical lens of information literacy.

The Facebook Group can be appropriated as a problem-solving tool and a relation-building tool. Depending on the mode of appropriation, different information literacies including different conceptions of credibility are enacted in the Facebook Group.

Keywords: information literacy, social network sites, socio-cultural theory, appropriation, higher education, teacher training

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On April 1 2012 one student in Swedish teacher training posted an April fools' joke to a Facebook Group. The Group was used for discussions of topics related to teacher training and more than 200 students and two educators were members. The joke claimed that pre-school teacher training[1] at the Swedish university in question was about to be closed down. The post received 296 comments during the course of a few days and resulted in a formal apology from one of the educators for taking part in the joke. This chain of events draws attention to the potential difficulties when a popular online technology such as Facebook is used in formal education and the complex process of developing information literacies when boundaries between informal and formal are blurred. The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyse the repurposing of Facebook into a tool for learning in teacher training, using the theoretical lens of appropriation and the empirical lens of information literacy.

Increasingly, web-services can complement traditional educational material used for teaching and learning, and students and educators are developing new ways of using the web to support learning (Kuhlthau, Caspari & Maniotes, 2007; Limberg & Alexandersson, 2010). The example in the present paper – Facebook – is the most used social network site (SNS) in the world with more than 1 billion users (Facebook, 2013a). Most undergraduate students have experience in using Facebook in their everyday lives, and Facebook is increasingly being repurposed for educational settings by teachers and students at all levels of education. The problems we all face when confronted with a wealth of ubiquitous (online) information is described by Kimmo Tuominen (2007) as an erosion of information contexts. In this view, a key aspect of information literacy is the ability to reconstruct the lost context in order for us to know who (or what) to believe, and why; in other words who (or what) to ascribe credibility, or cognitive authority (Wilson, 1983). Difficulties when students assess credibility in educational – and often digital – settings are highlighted in recent

information literacy research (e.g. Julien & Barker, 2009; Francke, Sundin & Limberg, 2011). Teacher training programmes worldwide have increased efforts in addressing information literacy issues during the last decade, but research still indicates a lack of opportunities for students to engage with active learning experiences that promotes critical thinking (for an overview, see Duke & Ward, 2009). Francke and Sundin (2012) describe different conceptions of credibility in the way teachers and librarians talk to their students about the use of participatory media in schoolwork. Conceptions of credibility, and the way lack of context becomes an issue on Facebook, are examined in more detail when the findings of the present study are discussed.

Social Network Sites in Educational Settings

Boyd and Ellison (2013) argue that the defining property of SNS is that they allow users to generate the content and to have unique profiles with publicly visible connections. Two different narratives can be identified in previous research on Facebook in educational settings. In one view, it is suggested that Facebook has been of little educational use. Madge *et al.* (2009) argue that students perceive SNS as a recreational space and do not want it 'spoiled' by academic discussions. Selwyn (2009) suggests that when students are using Facebook in an education-related way, it is mainly course-related administrative issues such as schedules and requirements for assignments that are being discussed, besides expressions of frustration towards instructors or jokes about assignments. In the other view, the educational potential of a tool that most students are using frequently is highlighted together with the possibilities to support new forms of communication between students and teachers (Lampe *et al.*, 2011). Other studies connect high levels of Facebook usage among American college students with the accumulation of social capital and well-being (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). It is also suggested that students appreciate being able to reach teachers instantly in an informal online environment (Bosch, 2009), and Mazer *et al.*

(2007) point out that Facebook provides a "*unique method to nurture the student-teacher relationship*" (p. 15).

Facebook has recently been discussed in relation to information literacy instruction within higher education. Witek and Grettano (2012) highlight the need for a critical awareness of how you use information to avoid tools (like Facebook) to make decisions for you. This awareness is described as a "meta-literacy", a concept also discussed by Mackey and Jacobson (2011) who invoke this term to broaden the scope of information literacy.

The two different narratives described above emphasize the need for more research; Facebook as an integral tool in undergraduate education has not been thoroughly studied (cf. Pimmer, Linxen, & Gröhbiel, 2012). Furthermore, most Facebook studies relating to educational uses have focused on Anglo-American undergraduate students (Madge *et al.*, 2009). The present study provides a different context adding to the empirical knowledge of Facebook used in educational settings as well as relating this use of Facebook to information literacy.

Conceptual Framework

Information literacy is a field of research attracting a broad range of researchers. Information literacy might also be understood as an empirical lens allowing researchers to investigate information practices connected to trust, credibility, information seeking and learning. In the present study, the empirical lens of *information literacy* is combined with the theoretical concept *appropriation* into one socio-culturally informed analytical perspective. The socio-cultural tradition draws attention to the ways in which cultural tools mediate thinking and learning processes (Säljö, 2010; Wertsch, 1991; 1998). This view on learning, as a social process of appropriation, connects to the notion of information literacy as a situated, socio-technical practice (Tuominen, Savolainen, & Talja, 2005; Bruce, 1997). Literacy scholar and linguist Gee argues that people are literate within "a domain if they can recognize (the equivalent of

'reading') and/or produce (the equivalent of 'writing') meanings in the domain" (2007, p. 20). Accordingly, information literacy is learned and enacted within specific social contexts and its numerous expressions, such as "searching, critically assessing, cutting, pasting, presenting and producing information" can only be understood in relation to the context, for example higher education (Francke, Sundin, & Limberg, 2011, p. 677; cf. Kuhlthau *et al.*, 2007).

To Wertsch, appropriation and mediation are closely associated, because "the relationship of agents toward mediational means can be characterized in terms of appropriation" (1998, p. 25). The term appropriation describes a process of "taking something that belongs to others and making it one's own" (Wertsch, 1998, p. 53). In this sense, appropriation is a relevant and fruitful concept to employ in the analysis of how technologies are repurposed in educational settings. The term is borrowed from the Russian linguist Bachtin and connects to the work of Vygotsky (1978) who describes learning as a process in which social interactions (on the intermental plane) precede the cognitive processes of the individual (on the intramental plane). Bachtin claims that the words we use are half someone else's, and that by using language we must appropriate the words of others and make them (partly) our own (Bachtin & Holquist, 1981). Appropriation concerns how tools are used when they have been adopted, without describing only the "binary and quantitative model of adoption" (Pimmer *et al.*, 2012, p. 727). As a way of internalizing culturally and historically situated tools, learning can be understood as "appropriation within social practices" (Pachler, 2010, p. 243). Arguably a central concept with relevance for socio-cultural research on information literacy, appropriation has only recently been connected to information literacy (Limberg, Sundin, & Talja, 2012). With the present study, the connection is made visible by showing how different ways of appropriating a tool affords different information literacies.

This conceptual framework allows the purpose of the article to crystallize into the following two research questions:

RQ1: How do teacher trainees appropriate Facebook as a tool for learning during teacher training?

RQ2: How are information literacies enacted in this process of appropriation?

Material and Method

Several studies within Library and Information Science have used ethnographic methods during the last decade (e.g. Foster & Gibbons, 2007; Lundh, 2011; McKechnie, 2000). The present study is part of a multi-sited ethnographical research project where learners are followed within and across different digital sites of learning. During a pilot-study, I learned that Facebook was the preferred mode of communication to most teacher trainees. The students used Facebook Groups to communicate: either in a large Group open to all the students studying the same programme and year, or in small Groups when they were doing group-work. Following the learners, the main part of the current study was conducted virtually, on Facebook. Ethnographic methods were used with the ambition to gain as much insight into the online interactions as possible without disturbing the communication that occurred "naturally" (cf. Markham & Baym, 2009). During a period of fieldwork, textual and visual data was collected from a Facebook Group while observation notes were made.

The main material for the present study consists of conversations from an open Facebook Group in which two hundred students and two educators were members. The 201 conversations included in the study took place during April and May 2012. The students were doing their second semester of pre-school teacher training at a Swedish university. During the two-month period of fieldwork, the students were working

with aesthetic expressions in relation to children's learning: working with movies, arts, drama and rhythmic. The total number of students enrolled 2011 in pre-school teacher training at the university was 249. Most of the students were females in their early twenties, and a large number had not studied at a university before.

Facebook has been critiqued for shortcomings in user privacy and control of user-generated content, and valuable research has been done in this area (e.g. Raynes-Goldie, 2010). It is not unproblematic from an ideological or ethical perspective to introduce commercial third-party services like Facebook to public schools and institutions, but these concerns lie beyond the scope of this paper.

The educator Kristian[2] initially created the Group, and Kenneth, the other educator using the Group, invited me to join. Kristian created this Facebook Group during the first months of the autumn semester 2011 as a way to facilitate efficient communication between teachers and students, and between students. Kristian argued that most students are using Facebook routinely, through laptops and smartphones. Expressing frustration with the difficulties of discussing on the virtual learning environment (VLE) used at the university, a Facebook Group appeared to be the best solution for efficient communication and was created. This was the first time the educators used a Facebook Group to communicate with students.

A Facebook Group is a feature of the SNS that allows users to communicate with a select group of people. Groups can be "Secret", "Closed" or "Open (public)". The Group in the present study was open which means that "[a]nyone can see the group, who's in it and what members post" (Facebook, 2013b). Members can make *posts* to the Group (including links, videos, images), *comment* posts and *like* posts and comments. Less frequently used features include *Polls*, *Group Files and Docs* and creating *Events*. An administrator (or admin) can message all the members of a Group. The admin of the Group was the educator Kristian. 93 students wrote something (a post or a comment) to the

Group during the two months of the study, and 44 students made at least one post. A handful of students were very active and made posts or comments almost every day. Around 50 per cent of the students in the Group were "lurkers" and did not make any posts or comments. In the present study, the visible interactions in the Group and those who use Facebook during pre-school teacher training are in focus; that is, how the Group is used once it has been adopted (cf. Pimmer *et al.*, 2012).

I distributed information about the research project to the Facebook Group, first through a post in the Group where the students could comment on the research proposal and ask questions, and a few days later through a message forwarded by Kristian to all group members asking for informed consent. No objections to the proposal were made and the study was conducted in accordance with the Swedish Research Council's guidelines for good research practice (Hermerén, 2011).

I assigned each conversation (a post including subsequent comments and likes) a number in chronological order, where the first conversation in the study was labelled "1". The length of a conversation varied significantly. Several conversations included few, or no, comments while some posts could generate more than 200 comments. During data collection and analysis several recurring themes in the discussions of the Group were identified. I read every conversation in the Group chronologically while producing ethnographical observation notes, and then reread the conversations several times together with the notes. Together with the observation notes, the themes served as a starting point for the analysis of the appropriation of the Group. The different themes can be seen as available building blocks when understanding students and educators in their attempts to construct a useful tool that is (partly) their own.

In the final part of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to gain further insights into specific issues regarding how students use (or don't use) the Facebook Group as an arena for learning. The material gathered offline, through interviews,

was used to contextualize and validate the online-material (cf. Davies, 2008). Three of the most active students in the Group and both educators were interviewed for these purposes. Every informant was asked a general set of questions about the use of the Group, but also a number of specific questions about their views on the use of the Group. These questions, customized for every informant, came with screenshots of specific conversations to spark discussions and aid memories. Together with the material from the observations and the observation notes, the transcribed interviews became part of a triangulation of data sources. Conversations and excerpts from interviews reproduced in this paper have been translated from Swedish.

Findings

Themes of Conversations

The initially identified themes were discussions about *Technological* issues, *Study related* discussions and messages that could have been posted on a traditional *Bulletin board* (or questions that could have been answered by consulting an official source of information, like a course guide). Since the *Bulletin board*-theme was found to deal with practicalities, the theme was renamed *Practical* issues. Two additional themes emerged later in the process of collecting and analyzing data: one theme with posts of a purely *Social* nature, that did not address issues relevant to the other themes, and one theme *About Facebook* that dealt specifically with the use of the Facebook Group.

The educators were active participants in the Group and often engaged the students in discussions to support learning, to communicate information and to discuss various issues. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of the posts are related to educational issues, mainly issues regarding specific academic tasks or concepts considered topical for teacher training. Another common theme includes posts of a purely social or humorous nature. The number of education-related

conversations together with a large amount of less serious use of the Group indicates that the divide between formal and informal in students' use of Facebook, as previously described by Selwyn (2009) and Madge *et al*. (2009), needs to be complemented with a more nuanced view of communication and learning.

The third most frequent theme includes questions related to practicalities, revolving around schedule or how to submit a paper, or notes that could have been found on traditional bulletin boards. Questions relating to technological issues are also common. The conversations in the two latter themes imply a view of the Group as a rich and credible source of information. The posts divided into themes of conversations are displayed below.

Theme	Number of conversations
Study-related	76
Social	54
Practical	32
Technological	26
About Facebook	13

Table 1. Number of posts divided into themes of conversation

As will be further discussed below, conversations from the category *About Facebook* suggested that the Group was being appropriated in distinctly different ways, creating tensions between two, partly, conflicting views on the purpose of the Group. The themes indicated how students and educators appropriated the Group as a tool for learning, and the conflicting views on the purpose of the Group showed how the process of appropriation was negotiated within the social practice of pre-school teacher training.

Appropriation occurs when a person internalizes a tool within a social context in a manner that is meaningful to a significant number of people in that context (cf. Pachler, 2010). These themes suggest a multitude of ways the Group can be used, and ultimately appropriated, in the setting of teacher training. As indicated in the next section, the wealth and variety of content in the Group, connected to the different ways the Group is used, creates difficulties in understanding the meaning and the context of conversations.

Understanding the Context of a Conversation

On April 10, the student Adam posts a link to a video he has created as part of the aesthetic expression-course. The video depicts him waking up and getting dressed. A discussion of the purpose of the video emerges, indicating the difficulties in determining the context or purpose of the post. The educators are trying to provide a context for the post by means of repeating the purpose of the assignment:

> Kristian: *A movie. During the movie week. Share. Inspire. What is your purpose?* (47:4 – SR[3])

Kenneth shares a few guidelines to consider when watching movies made by other students: "I think we need to practice: 1) not to judge 2) not to focus on the intentions of the sender 3) only take responsibility for your own feelings" (47:7 – SR). Through these comments, the two educators try to provide a context and to set the scene for a rich discussion about reception, message, meaning and artistic interpretation.

When students appropriate the Group as a useful and credible source of information where typically straight answers are given to practical questions, humorous posts can easily be misinterpreted. The April fools' joke mentioned earlier provides an illustration of this. One of the most active students in the Group publishes the following post during the afternoon of April 1:

Ester: *damn… just heard that [our] University will close down pre-school teacher training! this can't be right for ours can it?* (16 - S)

A discussion begins that will amount to 296 comments. In the early stages of the discussion, other students join the conversation and play along with the joke:

Ida: *That's right… How hard is it to look after children…! Pampers and Libero*[4] *will give quick courses on how to put on diapers the right way. And Lindex*[5] *has a two-hour training session on how to dress children quickly. Pedagogical activities are extravagant rubbish!!* (16:12 – S)

In this comment, it is clear that the student is ironically using stereotypical ideas mocking the non-professional image of pre-school teaching. Humour is used to build a sense of identity in the Group, and irony and playful use of stereotypes are important strategies of socialization for the students.

After an hour, the educator Kristian joins the students and posts the following comment:

Kristian: *Hmmm… Unfortunately, this is probably true. We have been reviewed by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and have received rather strong criticism. We had an emergency meeting at the department this Friday and we decided to announce the information to you, the students, the Tuesday after Easter. No new pre-school teacher training will start this fall. You who are enrolled now (enrolled fall 2011) will be offered places at [another university].* (16:14 – S)

Together with a group of students, Kristian continues to elaborate on the joke, expressing concerns for his own employment, the students and teacher training in general. The conversation is becoming increasingly playful:

Kristian: *To quote Vygotsky: 'you just have to make the best out of the situation'. [The other university] is not that bad.* (16:31 – S)

However, not every student is sensitive to the humorous nature of the conversation:

Rana: *I am also a little shocked and sad :/* (16:36 – S)

After about two hours, Ester thanks everyone for taking part in the joke, and says she is sorry if anyone was offended. This playful use of the Group suggests a mode of appropriation where students seize the opportunity to participate in constructing their identities as future pre-school teachers and builds a sense of community through humour and irony. Identity in the Group is constructed both from online and offline interactions, but Facebook enables the large student body to communicate in an online environment; outside of the Group, most of the students in the study never see each other except during a few lectures (where the number of students makes it impossible to socialize with everyone). Another important aspect is the fact that one of the educators played along with the joke and created uncertainty among some of the students who apparently viewed his comments as official information from the department with strong credibility. Even though several students evidently had difficulties recognizing the meaning Kristian and some students produced in this particular conversation (cf. Gee, 2007), these types of humorous or social conversations in the Group are important in the way they nurture relationships.

Nurturing Relationships

One condition necessary for the Group to function as a collaborative problem-solving tool, or as an arena for playful identity construction, is a willingness to interact with and help others in the Group. Posts of a social or humorous nature might not always address important issues, or ask "relevant" questions. But as a way of nurturing relationships (cf. Moll *et al.*, 1992; Francis, 2010) between students (and educators), this type of social conversation is arguably very important. The building of relations on Facebook (online) is known to influence the climate of the traditional classroom (offline) (Bosch, 2009). Having seen the movies made by her fellow students during the movie week mentioned above, Ester posts:

> Ester: *I am sitting here almost with tears in my eyes, but tears of joy! Sitting and smiling and laughing with all the amazing movies you have made! […] You are awesome every one of you!* (71 - S)

Just as in a small circle of friends, or in a family, members of the Group often share useful information, sometimes without previous requests for it. The nurturing practice exemplified above provides the participants in the Group with incentive, and confidence, to share valuable information and to take the time to help others out. Similarly, Mazer *et al.* (2007) find that Facebook can help create a more personal learning environment with positive effects for both students and teachers. Similar phenomena are well known in previous research on participatory media, and can be described in terms of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) or as a virtual household (Francis, 2010). The transparency of Facebook, where every interaction is visible to everyone, is a necessary prerequisite allowing this structure of nurturing and reciprocity to function within a large group. These nurturing practices are vital for the Group to function as an arena where students (and educators) can help each other out, discuss in a

friendly and open atmosphere and just hang out together. The practice of posting nurturing posts/comments is an important component in the appropriating of the Group as a tool for learning, and an important feature of the information literacies enacted in the Group. However, as implied above, different students have different views on how the Group should be used and understood.

Negotiating the Appropriation of Facebook as a Tool for Learning

The nurturing practices described above enable the students and the educators to appropriate the Group as a tool for learning. This is done in a number of different ways, but principally according to two different viewpoints that can be both complementary and competing. The idea behind the Group is not clear to everyone (nothing informative is revealed on the *About* page) and the purpose and use of the Group is discussed and negotiated on several different occasions. One view expressed is that the Group should be used to supply and discuss material closely connected to teacher training. The other view highlights the importance of broad discussions, including matters more vaguely connected to teacher training (but relevant in a wider sense), and the social aspects. The first view can be understood as a way of appropriating the Group as *a collaborative problem-solving tool*, and the second view as a way of appropriating the Group as *a relation-building tool*. An illustration of how these different ways of appropriating the Group can be negotiated is provided in the following. Feeling that the Group was being used for several off-topic posts, one student posted this entry on the subject:

> Karin: *Can't people just write about things related to teacher training? I wonder how many here actually care about all the other shit being written here. Stick to teacher training, because that was the idea with this group…* (14 – AF)

23 persons *liked* this entry, indicating a certain support for this view. In the discussion that followed, 62 comments were made. Kenneth replied:

> Kenneth: *I consider this an informal meeting place. If you want a serious tone, you should probably choose [the VLE]. No nonsense guaranteed.* (14:6 – AF)

After some discussions about creativity, the student who posted the entry replied:

> Karin: *It's not at all about killing creativity […] But it is all the personal drivel that is unnecessary[.]* (14:12 – AF)

Adam commented that he understood "the difficulties when sorting relevant from irrelevant, since [F]acebook is not promoting a forum design with search functionality or topics in categories." But at the same time, he finds fresh ideas in "the irrelevant" and describes the social dimension as the most important aspect: "the opportunity to reach and get to know people across borders." (14:16 – AF).

In this discussion, the tension between agents and mediational mean (cf. Wertsch, 1998) created by two constraining properties of Facebook (the excess of information and the difficulty sorting relevant from irrelevant) is highlighted. This tension sparks a discussion about how the tool should be used, and ultimately appropriated.

The Group Appropriated as a Collaborative Problem-Solving Tool

When the Group is being appropriated as a collaborative problem-solving tool, the students are using the affordances of Facebook and the collective intelligence in the Group to solve problems related to teacher training. The problems are often of a practical nature. At one time, a student posts a message about some lost books. The way the student

writes this post is very similar to the language and form of a note on a traditional bulletin board:

Elin: *Hello students!*

I am wondering if someone has taken care of my books in school or accidentally taken them? I was back immediately after […] we left the classroom and by then they were gone! […]

Regards
Elin (97 - P)

The issue is not resolved in the following comments, but other students express sympathy and offer suggestions of places to ask (the reception, the library). One of the educators comments that if someone finds the books, they can put them in his post box.

The large number of students together with the presence of the two educators ensure that the answer can generally be found through the Group, and the user-friendly interface and mobility of Facebook means that the answer comes quickly and at all times of the day. As exemplified above, one way of using the Group as a collaborative problem-solving tool is to use the reach and responsiveness of Facebook to post messages similar to those on traditional bulletin boards. Compared to a traditional bulletin board, posts to the Group are more likely to be read and can also be commented on.

This collaborative problem-solving mode of appropriating the Group serves to address the many technological issues the students are encountering, for example when producing movies and using the VLE to submit the results. Frustrated with the VLE, one students posts:

Lada: *Whaaaat! It doesn't work to upload the 3 min snippets to [the VLE] :/ […] Does anyone know what I'm doing wrong?* (195 - T)

Within a few hours, the student is offered several suggestions to solve the problem, but in the end she finds her own solution when she "uploaded it to YouTube instead and posted a link" (195:4 - T).

The Group Appropriated as a Relation-Building Tool

When the Group is being appropriated as a relation-building tool, learning is not understood simply as formal learning. Rather, the discussions connected to this mode of appropriation concern the wider context of life as a teacher trainee and a future pre-school teacher. This way of appropriating the Group is associated to a view of learning less inclined to distinguish between formal and informal learning.

The building of identity and becoming a member of a culture are key ingredients in the cultural process of learning (Gee, 2004). A dynamic social context can offer students better opportunities to learn through appropriation of tools and concepts within the social practices of teacher training. One student gives her view on what the purpose of the Group should be, when the use of the Group is being debated:

Ida: *Consider [the Group] a place where we can talk to each other, get/see new perspectives, meet over borders.* (30:5 - AF)

While the idea of the Group as a problem-solving tool described in the previous section supports learning by helping students to overcome practical obstacles during teacher training, this view tends to favour practical solutions to hands-on problems rather than in-depth discussions about the objects of learning.

Humour and irony are important communicative strategies in the relation-building mode of appropriation. Through a humorous and

personal approach, the line between formal and informal learning can be blurred. As in the example with the April fools' joke both students and educators can playfully move between different positions of identity in the course of their learning lives (cf. Erstad *et al.*, 2009). Mazer *et al.* (2007) and Loving and Ochoa (2011) suggest that Facebook can be used by educators for self-disclosure, which can increase motivation among students, and to create a positive classroom climate. The personal and relational aspects are also highlighted when Kristian is asked what he thinks is most valuable with the Facebook Group for him as an educator:

> Kristian: *The building of relations. […] I think it is more exciting to work with students that I have some sort of relation with, and I think they find it more exciting to meet a teacher who they also know a little about and have some kind of relation with.* (Interview 120608)

Discussion and Conclusions

In the following sections, the two different modes of appropriation are discussed and through this empirical example, the theoretical concept appropriation is connected to the enactment of information literacies in the Group. The difficulties of understanding the context of a conversation are discussed in the concluding section.

Two Different Modes of Appropriation

The accounts above describe two different ways of appropriating a Facebook Group as a tool for learning. When the Group is appropriated as a relation-building tool, it can be used to communicate in a playful and informal way, and educators are not necessarily considered to be representatives of the department. This mode of appropriation conveys an information literacy in which irony is an important communicative strategy in the Group. Positions of identity are not fixed (as in students and educators) but flexible and dynamic, a condition known to facilitate

learning (Moll *et al.*, 1992) and identified in previous research on learning in online environments (eg. Kochtanek & Hein, 2000). In the other mode of appropriation, the Group is a problem-solving tool used for providing and sharing information relevant to teacher training. In this mode of appropriation, the positions of identity are more fixed and students and educators are attributed with different roles and responsibilities, and different authority and credibility. The Group is understood as a credible and relevant source of information for the students and educators are seen as representatives of the department, with strong cognitive authority (cf. Wilson, 1983). Appropriated in this manner, the Group is read and written in a straightforward fashion and irony and sarcasm are often misinterpreted.

Individuals are not necessarily limited to one mode of appropriation only. For example, a student can move between using the Group to find (or provide) practical information about how to upload a movie to the VLE and then, minutes later, engage in an ironic discussion about the future of pre-school teaching. This is not to say that the two modes of appropriation are mutually inclusive. There appears to be a tendency among those who often use the Group as a relation-building tool to ignore conversations about practicalities that they think could be resolved simply by consulting the course guide. Conversely, those who tend to favour the problem-solving mode of appropriation at times seem annoyed with the amount of "irrelevant" conversations within the Group. Practices that are nurturing and rewarding for some might appear annoying or even offensive to others; this is clearly shown in the conversation following the April fools' joke described above. It should also be noted that of the two hundred students in the Group, around 50 per cent did not make any written contributions which might indicate that they did not appropriate the Group as a tool for learning. However, since 80 per cent of the total number of students did choose to be members of the Group, it is likely that several of the non-active students found the conversations useful. Several students are likely to have

appropriated the Group as a problem-solving tool by reading the posts and comments of others, and some students might also have enjoyed the opportunity to get to know their teachers and fellow students better even though they did not comment or post themselves.

Enacting Information Literacies in the Facebook Group

New participatory technologies are said to be making learning from interacting and participating with others easier and more natural (Thomas & Brown, 2011). However, the introduction of new tools to a context is not unproblematic (cf. Wertsch, 1998). Traditions from higher education may at times stand in opposition to the ethos of participatory media (cf. Lankshear & Knobel, 2007), and Facebook, with various properties meant to promote socialization, may both enable and constrain communication and learning. Judging from the results of the present study, one of the main difficulties users experience when communicating through SNS, from an information literacy perspective, appears to be the difficulties in determining the meaning and the context of a conversation (cf. Tuominen, 2007). This problem is also mentioned in the interviews and can be related to the fact that several students chose not to be members of the Group due to the large amount of (sometimes conflicting) information available. In the present study, it is clear that different ways of appropriating the Group suggests different ways of understanding (and creating) meaning, context and credibility – i.e. different information literacies.

Evaluating the credibility of a source is an important activity when information literacies are enacted, and a research area of interest to several information literacy studies (Francke *et al.*, 2011). In both modes of appropriation, the transparent nature of the discussions helps to create a sense of credibility. The Facebook Group is useful because of the multiplicity and the democratic, collaborative nature of knowledge production, but these properties also challenge established understandings of credibility (Francke & Sundin, 2012). Several students

who tend to appropriate the Group as a problem-solving tool attribute strong cognitive authority to the educators and perceive them as experts that offer credibility in terms of control and stability. When the Group is appropriated as a relation-building tool, students are less inclined to consider the educators as (mainly) representatives of the department and figures of authority. Julien and Barker (2009) assert that students need to practice how to evaluate content, and not only the properties of a resource. The Group has provided an opportunity for students to evaluate a wide variety of content, and the results indicate the importance of this practice.

A schematic overview of how the two modes of appropriation correspond to different ways of using the Group and different roles of students and educators is presented in the following table.

Mode of appropriation	As a problem-solving tool	As a relation-building tool
Main use of the Group	Providing and finding relevant and correct information	Relation building, exchange of ideas, construction of identity
Roles of students and educators	Fixed and stable, strong boundaries, traditional	Flexible, vague boundaries, dynamic

Table 2. The connection between appropriation, use of the Group and roles of students and educators

Conclusions: Context – Lost and Reconstructed

In this paper, two ways of appropriating a Facebook Group as a tool for learning in teacher training have been identified and discussed. Appropriation is found to be a valuable theoretical concept to the field of information literacy research that can be used to explain how information literacies are developed and enacted. Depending on the mode of appropriation, different ways of using the Group are preferred and different information literacies are enacted. A difficulty common to both types of appropriation is the issue of understanding the context of a conversation in the online environment of Facebook. This might also partly explain why around 50 per cent of the students in the Group did not make any posts or comments.

The humorous conversation in the Group on April 1 challenged the way some students perceived their educators in terms of authority and representation. A constraining property of Facebook highlighted in this example is the difficulty to understand the context, and the meaning of a conversation when a large number of persons participate in a discussion in real time with a multitude of perspectives and perceptions on the subject discussed. In a traditional classroom setting, the context is less ambiguous and the scene for discussion is set through information from schedules, the title of the lecture or seminar etc. On Facebook (and in online information environments in general), the scene needs to be set in real time, during the current conversation. This suggests that the most important aspect of being information literate when a Facebook Group is used in educational settings is to be able to reconstruct, and understand, contexts in real time.

The widespread use of Facebook in formal education will, in all likelihood, influence the development of new digital learning tools, such as VLEs. Future research should continue to chart the impact of educational Facebook use on students' conceptions of credibility and the

weakened boundaries between students and educators. This paper has provided one of the first attempts to connect the theoretical concept appropriation to information literacy. In the future, longitudinal studies should be conducted in order to better understand the on-going process of how learners appropriate participatory media in learning environments and the corresponding enactment of information literacies. Perspectives from non-users and reluctant users should also be more closely investigated in future research.

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Notes

1. Pre-school teacher training in Sweden is a 3,5-year university education (210 ECTS).
2. Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper to ensure the anonymity of the informants.
3. Every quote is labelled *xx:ii – nn*, where *xx* is the number of the conversation, *ii* the number of the comment and *nn* the identified theme.
4. Pampers and Libero are the two main diaper manufacturers in Sweden.

5. Lindex is a Nordic clothing company.

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