Networked Narratives as a Support to the Practitioner Living Abroad

by

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Abstract

International education opportunities contribute to the successful advancement of educational workforces in an evolving world. This research study focused on the intersection of social media, international education, and intercultural competency by examining the social media practices of teachers on a one-year educator exchange. Three major themes were explored: the networking of narratives in their overseas post, how educators on exchange used social media as a support system, and how social media platforms affected educator exchange experiences. The eight study participants, Alberta teachers who had each completed a one-year teacher-exchange to Australia during 2011 or 2012, were interviewed to obtain deeper insights on their use of blogging, microblogging, and teacher exchange experience as tools to aid in developing intercultural competency and assimilation. As educators embrace this unique professional development opportunity, there remain many ways for social media to leverage the teacher exchange experience beyond an informal support system. Although the study revealed the use of blogs and microblogs as a knowledge management system to be only in a nascent stage, thoughtful implementation of social media can network and support this community of practitioners virtually. Teacher exchanges leveraged by social media can strengthen teacher development and warrants further research and policy refinement.

Key Words: Teacher exchange, professional development, intercultural competency, international education, international practitioners, social media, Twitter, blogging, microblogging, social media as support system, knowledge management systems, diffusion of innovations theory, social capital theory

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Disclaimer

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Cooperation between nations takes place on many levels: cultural, political, academic, and economic to name a few. Education systems can be situated within this larger context of international collaboration. International initiatives have built programs that benefit the entire education system and, in turn, affect our province's ability to function in an evolving interdependent world. Students, administrators, and teachers involved in global education initiatives have profited from greater understanding between peoples and countries. School-based international education initiatives have exposed educators to social and cultural differences, alternative education methods, and new educational systems.

As countries develop an increasingly integrated global perspective, the interchange of educational views has been an integral part of the diffusion of new ideas and reforms. Interaction between education systems also can lead to a greater appreciation of educational practices in one's own community. International programs can add to the strength and resiliency of the school system itself and help educators navigate successfully through the technologically connected world of 21st century learning (Alberta Education, 2011). International initiatives such as teacher exchange have allowed educators to gain insights into their own culture and engage effectively with the international community. The knowledge gained by participating in international programs transfers into the classroom and to their students, which is then translated to wider economic, political, and cultural structures (Alberta Education, 2011).

A teacher exchange is a specific example of collaboration between individual teachers and education authorities. Professional development is an important aspect of practice across

many disciplines. Allowing educators to expand their proficiencies and reach their full potential allows for a more skilled, flexible, and competitive workforce (Alberta International, 2013). Ideally, educator exchanges present a unique professional development opportunity for teachers and school administrators to collaborate within their profession. Exchanges are complex and multi-faceted, and not all aspects of switching homes and vocations with another educator are positive. Not all the theoretical benefits may be realized in practice, there can be a divergence between theory and practice. For instance, entire populations are excluded from this opportunity; it remains overall a prospect that extends itself to a mobilized elite. This is exemplified by the scope of partners that Alberta deals with for exchange—mainly Commonwealth and highly developed countries.

An international teacher exchange experience forces educators to step outside their familiar surroundings and educational landscape to explore new learning and teaching communities. Pedagogical knowledge is 'unpacked' and applied in unknown territory; exchange teachers operate in an education system and culture unfamiliar to them. Each participating system gains relevance firsthand—triggering an examination and purposeful cultivation of practices. Active participation is much different from textbook learning about educational systems, and their differences and similarities. Once a system is decontextualized, new structuring of educational systems and pedagogical methods can be abstracted by the exchange participant. Therefore, the participant is able to achieve a deeper theoretical understanding of the forces acting upon education globally and how the home and host systems form pieces of a larger interconnected framework.

As institutions and educators see increasing value in leveraging social media with their students, so too, are educators beginning to harness technology platforms to heighten their

connections, networks, and learning. The way people connect with one another is changing. As the number of connections increases, so does the learning potential. The participants' sense of isolation from their social, professional or other support networks can be reduced while in a foreign environment. Implementing social media over the course of an international teacher exchange can help optimize the benefits of exchanges and add value to our education system.

This study concentrated on the intersection of international education, intercultural competency, and social media. The study was structured thematically into three parts: technology mediated or networked narratives, social media platforms as support systems, and the teacher exchange experience. Of particular interest was how blogging while on an international teaching exchange affected the exchange teacher. In today's networked world individuals use technology seamlessly in their daily lives, but how can the use of social media benefit the exchange experience? As comfort levels with technology increase, an exchange teacher can use social media to facilitate collaboration. However, the integration of technology on the exchange teacher experience can act as a benefit or a hindrance to attain intercultural competencies and professional growth. The connection with others in the home country can aid in the acculturation process or, alternatively, in maintaining separation from the new culture. These ideas are explored in depth throughout the study.

Origin of Study and Researcher Reflexivity: A Personal Narrative

The following narrative of my personal experience with an international teacher exchange chronicles my motivation for investigating the role played by social media technologies in teacher exchanges. It is intended to detail my background and biases and to situate the study within a particular social and cultural context.

When I learned that my spouse's teacher exchange application for Australia was accepted in 2003, I was thrilled: A year abroad—a change of pace, an adventure for our family. However, more than being a travel opportunity, it was a chance to immerse ourselves and assimilate into a different culture. It was a window into new ways of seeing and doing. For my husband, the teacher, it was a unique way to gain insights into his teaching practices in a very experiential way. Little did he know that by teaching in an Australian classroom that it would bring about a deeper level of reflection about his teaching methods and school systems within an international context.

After going to an initial pre-departure orientation, I learned that my husband was one of 19 Albertan educators selected to teach in various Commonwealth countries. All 19 of these teachers came together in one room to prepare for a year-long sojourn, taking their vocation to an overseas location and trading homes with their partner educators. We applied for visas and made flight arrangements, soon to be dispersed throughout the globe to teach for a year.

Benjamin Franklin noted, "there are three sorts of people in the world. Those who are immovable; people who do not get it, and they are not going to do anything about it. Then there are the people who are movable, people who see the need for change and are prepared to listen to it. And then, there are the people who move, people who make things happen" (TED Talk, 2013). I hope our family can include ourselves in the last group, people who make things happen. By accepting a year-long teacher exchange, we wanted to grow personally and professionally and adapt to the challenges that were to lie ahead of us.

Although we met with the group of Alberta teachers on exchange prior to our departure, our contact with this group of people was sporadic at best. At the time of the exchange, the only

communication technologies readily available were telephone and email. There was no Skype, YouTube, Facebook, blogging platforms, or Tweeting—no social media on the scale that exists today. For example, the invention of Twitter took place three years after our exchange, in 2006. When we wanted to stay in touch with family and friends, it was through email, telephone calls, and letters. We did not have a digital camera, so sharing images was challenging and time consuming. By the time I had developed the photographs, the special moment was long gone and we were already on to the next chapter.

I started doing weekly updates of the "Freed Adventures Down Under," and emailing them to a list of people back in Canada. Not only did it keep a group of people informed all at once, but in sending me a copy, it provided a centralized archive. It was a timeline of our intercultural experience that was permanently documented. It was instant sharing that I could direct. The commitment to this narrative allowed critical reflective space on the new traditions we were learning, the new people we were getting to know, and the friendships and connections we were forming. Our emails were taking on a one-to-many communications aspect, reaching a larger audience. The random notes and observations became part of a larger body of work and the pieces of our intercultural puzzle were slowly put together to form a larger picture.

The emails were a controlled account of our cultural experience, filtered appropriately for the intended audience. They highlighted similarities and differences between cultures, the little nuances in daily routine such as afternoon tea, the unannounced visitor, and linguistic differences. My view of the world began to shift—Australians did not drive on the "wrong" side of the road, they drove on the opposite side according to the North American-centric way of thinking. I could see my perspective changing, as I realized that I had particular biases. I concluded that much of the way I navigated meaning was biased.

Not only did the technology allow me to reach inside of myself, but it also permitted me to reach out to others. I was learning from, and with, others. The emails were an important source of connection to the safe and controlled. The stresses of adapting to new situations were lessened by having access to email, in that this was a medium I could control.

My email messages documented the progress of our acculturation. The first part was the honeymoon phase—excitement about the smallest details of Australian life. Other times, it was separating from this culture—comparing everything to the North American standard in a pejorative manner. At times, the challenges seemed insurmountable. I also wanted to reach out to other teachers and families on exchange in Australia, which proved to be difficult. Other exchange families were not able to find me—my emails were not internet searchable. In retrospect, I thought about how useful it might have been to have created a blog.

We could have had a better idea of what to expect by looking at blogs of other people who had been on exchange. It might have lessened our stress as we adjusted to a new way of living in another country. Had we been able to connect virtually with our exchange colleagues, I think it would have provided an additional source of support and expertise, a forum for questions and advice, and a degree of comfort knowing that there were others in similar circumstances.

Our exchange experience was over a decade ago and my career interests have since taken a path of communications and technology. My passion for the intercultural has led me to coordinate the Alberta International Educational Program. As the liaison, I am heavily invested in the teacher exchange experience and believe that it is life changing, regardless of whether you are a teacher, spouse, or accompanying family member.

My study of the evolution of technologies and their sharing and community-building capacities has caused me to reflect upon the impact that technology has had on teacher exchanges and the way it can support this experience.

Research Questions

This study investigates teacher exchanges and blogging to see how technology and social media applications affect the teacher exchange experience. The research focuses on the following three questions, and these three themes are developed throughout this study in the following order.

1. How do educators on exchange use internet postings of their narratives and experiences in their overseas post?

2. How do educators on exchange use social media as a support system?

3. How do social media platforms affect educator exchange experiences?

Limitations

This study is by design qualitative constructivist, and it is acknowledged that all are subject to the socially constructed nature of experience. My engagement with the topics was subject to my own context as a past participant of a teacher exchange, a coordinator of an exchange program, and a proponent of social media technologies. My interpretations as a researcher are taken within particular social, historical, and cultural contexts that may or not be the same lens through which the study subjects perceived their constructed realities. As such, I cannot fully understand the realities of the study participants, but I can merely reconstruct them within my own worldview and biases. The narrative in the introduction of the study highlighted these biases and permitted reflexivity to attempt to break down these views. The study has been limited to Canadian teachers on exchange from the province of Alberta with the International Educational Exchange Program ("IEEP") through the Government of Alberta.

Delimitations

Due to the potentially large scope of this study, its focus was delimited to Alberta exchange

teachers on exchange specifically to the country of Australia. This encompassed several Alberta

jurisdictions and Australian states. The Alberta school systems were all public, but the Australian

schools were a mix of government and private school jurisdictions. It was deliberately delimited

in this way as the majority of teacher exchange participants were matched to Australian teachers

and the participation levels have historically been strong with this country. Other destinations

such as Denmark and Germany have had few year-long exchanges, so attaining a reasonable

number of subjects would have required spreading the term to a decade or more. This was

problematic in terms of the ever-evolving nature of communication technologies. Thus, it was

necessary to study the most recent social media technologies. Twitter only came into being in

2006 and blogging is still in the process of becoming commonplace, so interviewing participants

who were on exchange 10 years ago would not have been useful. It was therefore of paramount

importance to get the most recent group of study volunteers possible.

The study could have been enriched by examining this issue across the entire country of

Canada or to expand it internationally, but due to time and transportation restraints, this was not

possible. Reaching beyond one province might have provided more insights across a broader

section of educators on exchange.

Significance of the study

A general aim of this study was to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of

international teacher exchanges, as the research in this area is currently very limited. Blogs and

microblogs have not yet been studied for their ability to foster informal learning leading to self-

sustaining communities of practice in the context of international exchange teachers. Nor has there been research in this field regarding the contribution of social media to aid in developing intercultural competency and helping exchange teachers to assimilate.

This study may inform school jurisdictions in Canada and jurisdictions abroad to consider social media tools as a performance support. The findings may serve as a jumping off point to maximize networks in a productive manner that enables educators to demonstrate responsible global citizenship. I hypothesize that tools such as the blog and microblog have the potential to increase the learning of educators on exchange and develop into a knowledge management system to enhance effective practices. Equipping teachers to perform optimally while overseas on an exchange may allow them to flex within their own home systems upon return and to better adapt to educational reforms. It may also reinforce that exchanges are strategic investments in professional development for a viable and flexible globalized workforce.

Currently, exchange teachers are an isolated group embarking on their professional development journey without much support from their home system. Knowing how to assist these communities to connect on the level of best practices may help future exchange participants reach deeper, more meaningful understandings of how the exchange experience will affect their own practice. It is especially useful to gain this information from the participants themselves. The findings and resulting discussions can serve as a starting point from which to help save others from having to work out their own ways to maximize intercultural proficiencies and encourage educational reforms.

The understandings gleaned from this population can be applied on a wider level to help educators become more globally minded and see their role in 21st century learning. Figure 1

shows the increase in the use of the blogging platform in the educational sector compared to

other sectors. Education reported a double-digit increase in the use of blogging. Figure 2 shows

the intentions of these sectors to implement various social media in their organisations. This

demonstrates emerging trends in social media usage, in the United States, that should be

contemplated when considering the best platform to use when embarking on an educator

exchange.

Figure 1: Trends in blogging by sector.

This figure shows the trends for the use of the blogging platform from 2008 to 2011as

indicated by percentage of companies with a blog. It highlights that all sectors in the

United States, including higher education, have seen a rise in the use of this social media

platform and that the education sector has seen the largest jump from 2010 to 2011 over

all the other sectors. Barnes & Lescault (2012)
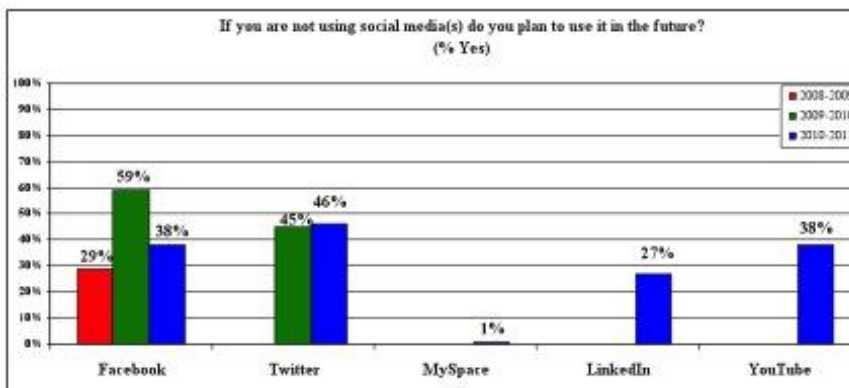
Figure 2: Intentions of social media implementation in the US Higher Education Sector.

This figure shows the intent of the US education sector to implement various social media platforms. Twitter and LinkedIn both scored highly, as did YouTube (Barnes & Lescault 2012).

A more particular goal of the study was to deconstruct descriptive data from participants, transferable across a larger population. The investigation of networked narratives, support systems and teacher exchange experience may serve as a road map for future international teachers and how they choose to leverage technology to enhance their immersion into another education system and culture. Establishing the explicit and implicit purposes of employing particular technologies also may help other educators develop novel uses for existing technologies.

In May 2013, the Alberta government issued Alberta's International Strategy 2013: Building Markets. This was a timely government document underlining that teacher exchange is an important avenue to building world markets and placing Alberta on the world education stage. In positioning programs to "encourage a more global perspective through Alberta's education system" (Alberta International, 2013, p. 11), I hope that this study will inform future international education program policy in the province and beyond provincial borders.

Chapter Summary

This section revealed the context of the research study and underlined the importance of investigating the idea of social media supporting and international experience. My own personal experience was brought in as a means to identify biases and why this area of research is of particular interest and relevance to me. Bringing in my communication practices and interest in the field of communications and technology allows for a more balanced reflection and clarifies

for the reader the context in which this study was conducted. This chapter also reveals why this

particular area of research is important as a current and future area of research.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

This literature review examines the intersection of networked narratives, supports, and the teacher exchange experience. Social media platforms of blogging and microblogging through Twitter are explored theoretically. Existing research is explored in the context of social media as supports in network formation and as an effective support in the area of international education. This framework will permit a thorough understanding of the research questions posed.

What is Global and International Education?

Global education affords an enriched learning of similarities and differences of education systems. "Global education develops the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are the basis for decision making and participation in a world characterized by cultural pluralism, interconnectedness, and international economic competition" (Merryfield, 1992). "Global education is an effort to cultivate a perspective of the world which emphasizes the interconnections among cultures, species, and the planet. Globalization "forces us to reach out across boundaries and to contribute across geography, disciplines, and cultures" (Wenger, E.S.; White, N.; and Smith, J.D., 2009, p. 199).

International education includes initiatives that build intercultural competency, knowledge of the international community and a sense of global citizenship amongst educators. Educators can gain greater insight into their own culture and how to engage effectively with other cultures. "Globalization and informatization allow, even encourage, one to adopt new perspectives and identities" (Alberta Education, 2011, p. 9). Educators must understand the complexity of globalization and develop skills in cross-cultural interaction if they are to become effective citizens in a pluralistic and interdependent world. The benefits go beyond the level of

the teacher to include cultural, political, academic, and economic impacts (Alberta Education, 2011).

Key components of international education programs include internationally infused curriculum and international school partnerships. The study of local-global connections heightens awareness that our individual choices have far-reaching consequences. It allows educators to process information from multiple perspectives. Teaching with a global perspective differs from traditional approaches in that its focus is on cultural universals as well as what makes us unique. Cross-cultural understanding, open-mindedness, anticipation of complexity, and appreciation of other people's points of view are essential in the development of a global perspective (Merryfield, 1995).

Personal cross-cultural experiences abroad are a significant part of international education. Study tours, student and faculty exchanges, and semesters abroad are some of the ways teacher educators build cross-cultural knowledge, develop skills in cross-cultural communication, and motivate teachers to teach from a global perspective (Gilliom, 1993; Wilson, 1982).

Globally minded educators are enabled by professional development opportunities to make curricular connections. Merryfield (1992) asserts that educators help their students develop global citizenship abilities to respect human rights. What results is a teaching force that is more receptive to change and tolerant of difference. Teachers can develop insights into the process of understanding cultural perceptions and the relationship between instructional methods and learning outcomes in global educations. Professional development programs set aside time for

teachers and teacher educators to reflect, experiment, and share ideas and experiences with colleagues (Merryfield, 1992).

Teacher Exchanges as Professional Development Learning

"The interconnected nature of the world today makes international education more valuable and relevant than ever" (Alberta Education, 2011). The IEEP administered by the Alberta Teachers' Association, offers professional development opportunities under existing exchange agreements with its international counterparts. The program allows Alberta educators to enrich their teaching practice by teaching overseas in Australia, Denmark, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom on year-long teacher exchanges and short term job shadows for teachers and administrators. Long term exchanges involve a switching of teaching assignments and homes for one year, while the job shadows are hosted reciprocal exchanges with their international counterparts for a two week period.

This government of Alberta international education initiative encourages Alberta teachers to reach out beyond their borders of geography, discipline, and culture. The IEEP mission is to "maintain and improve the competence of teachers," and to enrich the teaching profession (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2013). These educator exchanges take place within the framework of intergovernmental memoranda of understanding.

Teachers are motivated to undertake professional development initiatives to become better teachers, increase their competencies, and increase their professional satisfaction. They hope to gain concrete and practical ideas. Guskey observed that "evidence in action" (2002, p. 381) is very powerful. The experience of successful professional development implementation

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is very strong—they believe it works because they have seen it work, and that experience shapes their attitudes and beliefs.

Stringman (1989) asserted that an experientially-based learning process such as a teacher exchange is a highly cost-effective mode of staff development, comparing favourably with conventional secondments or traditional courses. It stretches the comfort zones of educators to experience new systems and new ways of doing things. Most teachers who participated in a teacher exchange felt that they had been able to make a worthwhile contribution to curriculum development (Stringman, 1989, p. 371). The goal was to create enduring change in teachers' attitudes and perceptions. Although professional development programs can vary greatly, they share a common goal to "alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understanding of school persons toward an articulated end" (Griffin, 1983, p. 2). In the context of teacher exchanges, Griffin asserts that the goals are to improve student learning, improve the classroom practices of teachers, and develop the attitudes and belief in relation to good global citizenship.

Teacher exchanges, at their best, involve a complete immersion into another country's education system. A teacher exchange permits educators to theorize, reflect, and analyze the host country's system as well as their own from an outside perspective. "To be a reflective practitioner requires an examination of one's practices to make more explicit one's learning and pedagogical knowledge" (Tarc, 2007, p. 76).

In sum, the literature supports the view that similar to gaining altitude and observing the topography from a plane, educators obtain an overview of the educational landscape from participating in an exchange. One can start to pick out patterns, derive meaning, build on tacit and explicit knowledge, and understand the underpinnings of a system—both its strengths and its

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weaknesses. An exchange is not over after a year—its ripple effects continue to be felt long after the exchange partners return to their home countries. The international exchange experience extends beyond the teacher, student, and school body, to add to the strength and resiliency of the school system itself and to help navigate and adapt to our interconnected and ever-changing world.

Teacher Exchanges and the Interconnected World

Much has changed since the inception of teacher exchanges. The Alberta government initiated exchanges over 30 years ago, and what a different world that would have been. Contact between family and friends would have been restricted to mailed letters that would have taken weeks to arrive. By the time news reached its intended audience, the exchange teachers would already be a few chapters ahead in the story of their exchange periods complete with tribulations and successes. Now educators on exchange can connect virtually, independent of geography and time. Messages can be sent to a wider audience, thanks to the scalability of networked narrative platforms such as blogs and Twitter feeds (Shirky, 2008). Because it is so instant and effortless, the conversations become more like snippets rather than well thought out letters where writers reflect before putting pen to paper. Today's networked world has changed the way we interact with each other, the scope, and the collaborative potential of our interactions. This is especially relevant when considering how the networks can support the acculturative process of teachers on exchange.

Acculturation

Berry (1997) categorized four possible strategies of acculturation: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. According to this categorization scheme, assimilation occurs when the non-dominant group does "not wish to maintain their cultural

identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures" (Berry, 1997, p. 9). Separation takes place

when individuals wish to maintain cultural identity and do not wish to interact with the dominant

culture. Integration is the third acculturation strategy. It seeks to blend participation in the new

culture while maintaining the individual's culture. Marginalization is an acculturation tactic

defined as having little interest in participating and little possibility in being able to maintain

one's culture. These outcomes depend on whether the individual values the relationship with the

larger society or if it is more important to "maintain one's identity and characteristics" (Berry,

1997, p. 9).

Acculturation defines the cultural changes that take place following a meeting between

cultures. Teachers on an education exchange, according to seminal intercultural research, belong

to the same group as immigrants, refugees, and sojourners (Berry, 1997, p. 7). Exchange teachers

fall into the migrant category defined by Berry (1997, p. 7). "Individuals and groups may hold

varying attitudes towards [these four ways of] acculturating, and their actual behaviors may vary

correspondingly. Together, these attitudes and behaviors comprise what we have called

acculturation strategies" (Berry, 1997, p. 11). Individuals might choose several strategies to cope

with living in the new culture, but tend to settle generally on one strategy.

What is desirable for social integration is for the individual and society of settlement to

offer mutual accommodation (Berry, 1997; Gresham & Clayton, 2011; Suanet & Van de Vijver,

2009). Some cultural groups such as immigrants willingly acculturate; others such as refugees

experience it differently. For the sojourners the immersion is temporary. Whatever the situation,

all these groups appear to undergo the same processes of acculturation (Berry, 1997, p. 9).

Kim & Ruben (1988) stated that a cross-cultural move naturally involved stress, with the individual attempting to integrate aspects of the new culture while trying to maintain aspects of the old one (Figure 3). The restructuring process involves a shift in the person's communication patterns in order to meet the goal of satisfactory intercultural communication experiences. Hall (1976) termed this process "identity-separation-growth dynamism." "Through continuous intercultural stress-adaptation-growth experiences stimulated by the environmental challenges, they have expanded their internal capacities to function in the changed environment" (Kim & Ruben, 1988, p. 312).
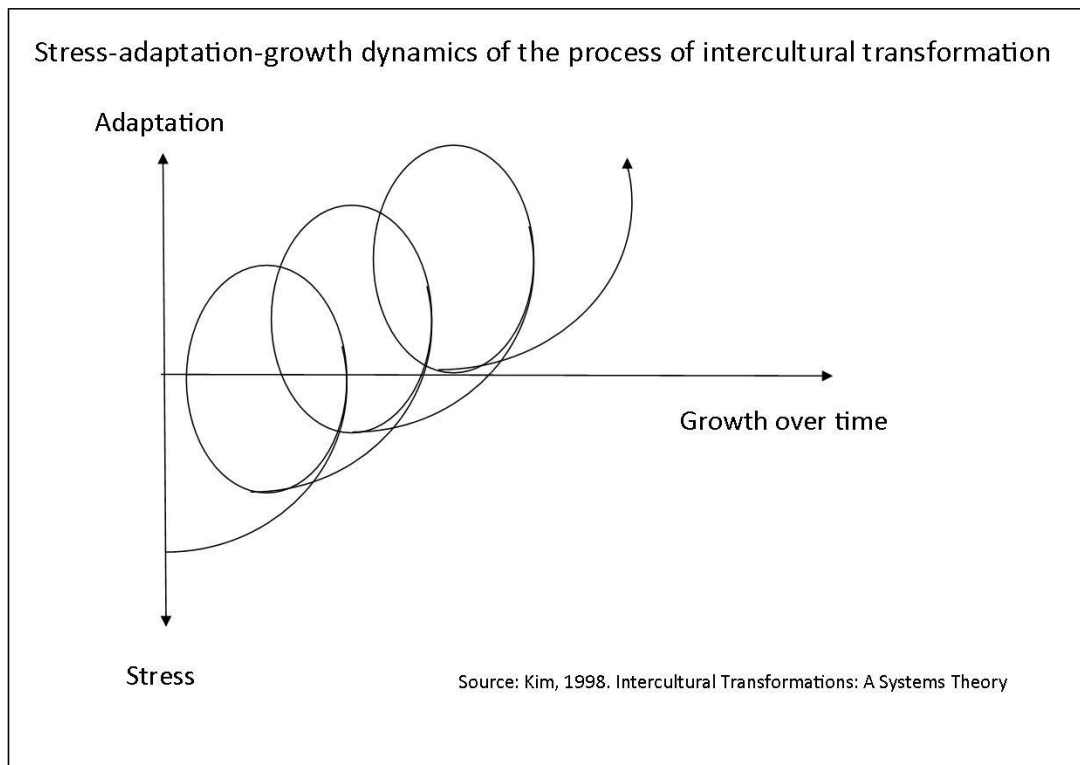
Figure 3: Stress-adaptation-growth for culture shock.

This figure shows this process of stress, adaptation, and growth vis à vis human systems principles.

"As has been demonstrated amply by numerous immigrants and sojourners who have successfully overcome severely stressful situations and transformed themselves adaptively, the process of becoming intercultural is not only a philosophical ideal but also an empirical phenomenon" (Kim & Ruben,1988, p. 316). This restructuring due to the tension between stress (culture shock) and adaptation results in growth or greater intercultural understanding.

Intercultural Stress and Adaptation

This section separates relevant themes across key pieces of intercultural research literature pertaining to the adjustment and help-seeking behaviours of professionals overseas. It focuses on how modern day network formation aids in the acculturation process and formation of community. The topics that are detailed are support systems: buffers, informal networks, social networks, and the acceptance of social media tools such as blog and microblogs. From this discussion, social media as a contribution to knowledge management is explored.

In the compilation and analysis of the literature, a significant gap in the field of sojourning professionals became apparent, specifically, the population of educators on a teacher exchange. As the percentage of teachers who have been on exchange in the province of Alberta and worldwide is relatively small, there has not been much attention drawn academically to this area. For example, in 2011, the province of Alberta had less than 0.01% of its full time teacher population involved in the Government of Alberta's IEEP Program.

Social Support Systems as Buffers

Much of the literature made the assertion that "the quality of the social support system had not only a direct but also a buffering effect when undergoing psychological stress" (Yeh & Inose, 2003, p. 17). Figure 3 demonstrates that adaptation to stress follows a particular pattern.

Keel & Drew's (2004) findings show that emotional supports acted as a buffer, enhancing positive emotions and the international experience (Keel & Drew, 2004; Gresham & Clayton, 2011). With a sense of connectedness to the new community, acculturative stress is reduced (Keel & Drew, 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Satisfaction with the social supports also can mitigate or reduce acculturative stress (Keel & Drew, 2004).

Informal Networks: Peer and Social Networks

Acculturative stress can interfere with the professional's ability to integrate and benefit from the experience in the host country. In the face of challenges, there can be a reluctance to seek help from counsellors or government organizations. A less formal structure is generally more beneficial and is accessed more often across groups of sojourners (Keel & Drew, 2004; Yeh, Okubo, Ma, Shea, Ou & Pituc, 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Frey & Roysircar, 2006). Collaboration from within the social milieu offered an alternative solution (Zhao, 2009). Productive benefits often come from people who care to invest in a common interest or good. Connections and contributions are made based on a shared goal to create community.

Putnam (2001) discovered that these ties could provide crucial social and psychological support. Keel & Drew extended this premise, positing that the need to find supportive networks can help develop community (2004, p. 112). Informal networks for teachers on a teacher exchange can provide an important source of support. These support mechanisms can include virtual groups on social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr, and Twitter. Exchange teachers might also reach out to colleagues, family, and friends using other technology platforms like instant messaging, email, blogs, and Skype. The informal networks that these

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technologies facilitate provide a source of guidance and advice, and helped users share experiences and information (Hashim, p. 35, 2004).

Peer networks

Differentiation has been made between the kinds of networks that constitute social networks and the importance placed on informal networks (Keel & Drew, 2004). Research in this field points toward the development of community and peer programs on an informal basis. Being able to approach a colleague who has a shared experience can be a valuable support (Yeh et al., 2008). As a larger collective, "cultural exchange groups can foster a sense of community" (Keel & Drew, 2004; Ha and Lin, 2009; Jacob and Greggo, 2001). Involving the host community can lead to a rewarding educational experience and can act as a "catalyst for enhancing cultural awareness and social integration" (Gresham & Clayton, 2011, p. 373). "The protective benefits of cultural maintenance and social support can be disseminated through ethno-cultural community interaction, thereby reducing the stresses associated with assimilation" (Berry, 1997, p. 28). Literature in the field of intercultural studies revealed that migrant groups exhibiting help-seeking behaviours in the acculturation process prefer accessing their peer groups to government or formal institutions. Facilitating community connectedness from the host country is an important aspect of creating support networks and increasing satisfaction for the practitioner working overseas.

Social networks

Social networks and the proliferation of social media platforms will be examined in terms of their ability to assist in the acculturative process of teachers on exchange. First, the formation of networks will be analysed and then overlaid onto the platforms of blogging and

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microblogging. Putnam (2001) explored the social networks that people build to explain investments in common community outcomes. Social networks provide bonding capital by creating trust amongst specific homogenous groups. Social networks also serve to reach out across social classes to provide bridging capital (Putnam, 2001). The notions of bridging and bonding capital are explained below. Social media technologies are a story of networked communities appropriating new digital spaces to convene. In this new technology-rich world, these digital habitats are shaped by their users, intertwining to meet the needs of community connection (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 20). In inhabiting these spaces, people contribute to social capital.

Social capital theory

Putnam describes social capital as being composed of two types of ties, bridging (inclusive) and bonding (2001, p. 22). Bonding, or exclusive ties, tend to "reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups" (Putnam, 2001, p. 22). Bonding ties are good for undergirding specific reciprocity and encouraging solidarity. Bridging, or inclusive networks, are distributed and more appropriate for information diffusion (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 192). This would be exemplified by the teacher exchange IEEP website that offers information and a repository of policies and procedures.

Social capital theory speaks to the productive benefits that come from people who know each other enough to care to invest in the common good (Putnam, 2001, p. 22). The connections made are based on a goal-created community and the ability to contribute virtually and asynchronously. Where there is shared affinity, a community can arise (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 65). A "shift has occurred between residence-based and workplace-based networks, a shift from locational communities to vocational communities" (Putnam, 2001, p. 85). He further

suggests that, "Bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves" (2001, p. 23). Social media tools also let us extend bridging and bonding ties, enlarging our reach and reducing barriers to participation.

In a similar fashion to Putnam, Kadushin posits that the use of blogging or microblogging is conducive to formation of "weak ties"—acquaintances who are outside of one's regular social network (Kadushin, 2012, p. 21). Blogging and microblogging allow users to more easily reach out and interconnect with others and make interconnection.

Diffusion of innovations theory

The spread of the new ideas and acceptance of new technologies, otherwise known as the diffusion process, happens largely on a subjective basis and is worked out through a process of social construction, according to Rogers (2003, p. 112). Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovations refers to "a kind of universal process of social change" (p. 88) and he notes that diffusion is "a special type of communication in which the messages are about a new idea" (p. 99). The way individuals approach adoption of a new technology varies, and Rogers (2003) developed categories describing the behavior of different group's approaches to new innovations.
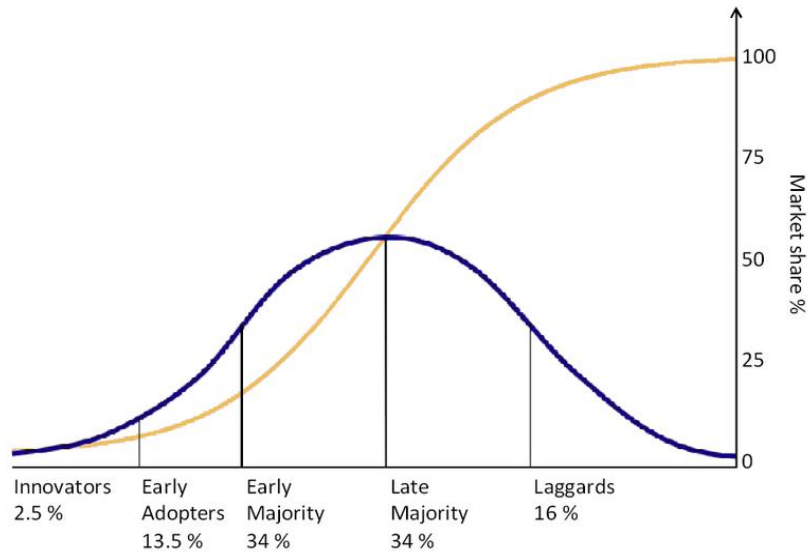
Figure 4: Rogers' theory of diffusion of innovations.

This figure shows the grouping of individuals according to their adoption style of new

technologies.

Diffusion of innovations theory proposes that the blogging platform is conducive to the

formation of weak ties—acquaintances outside of one's regular social network. The micro-level

communications bridged by the macro-level blogging network are a powerful phenomenon.

Weak ties are more likely than strong ties to link members of different small groups and help in

the diffusion of ideas and resources (Granovetter, 1973). The adoption of blogging among

educators on exchange must first happen with the right group of people—approaching the late

majority or "laggards" in Figure 4 would not be as useful. The "village opinion leaders" (Rogers,

2003) must be sought out, reaching a critical mass to become self-sustaining. Rogers (2003)

elaborates on an example of a small and remote community in Peru. The adoption of an

innovation is impeded because the leader's support was not gained. As with Rogers' (2003)

example of the adoption of boiling water into daily activities, the adoption of Twitter or blogging

must first happen with the right group of people. Rogers describes how the public health

initiative encouraged residents of a Peruvian village to boil water. It failed to improve health conditions because the opinion leaders of that community did not buy into the new innovations (Rogers, 2003, p. 94). The innovation presented was considered culturally ineffective. Encouraging change was made more effective when shared by someone with a mutual subcultural language (Rogers, 2003). Thus, it would seem that employing respected and trusted teachers who have been on exchange to show other teachers how to blog would be the most effective way to help this technology gain acceptance.

Social Media

Technology permits massive collaborations, connecting people beyond their usual geographical limitations and providing an online interactive environment (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 14). Technology can support an experience of togetherness that makes a community a social container for learning together and can reduce the sense of isolation (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 11). In this regard, this study examined the use of blogging and the microblogging platform of Twitter as effective tools for collaboration and communication in the professional realm.

Social media has effectively changed the way we communicate. If we rewind 30 years ago when Alberta's Ministry of Education began post-to-post exchanges under memoranda of agreements (Alberta Education, 2011), the main tools used by exchange teachers to communicate were posted letters or infrequent telephone calls. Today, decentralized access, simultaneity, and interconnectivity arising from the digitization of our networks have changed the expression of our activities. Digitization has been transformative just as the technologies of the printing press and the telegraph were revolutionary. People can now unite across interest lines rather than political borders. Geography is no longer a core organizing principle and the barrier of location is no longer an obstacle. The ability to affect and influence each other has changed.

Social media technology alters the traditional way we form membership in networks. Mobile communications enable individuals to access global or local communications networks anywhere, anytime. Virtual propinquity does not necessarily presuppose or require an affiliation of value systems. As Shirky (2008) states, the gap between intention and action is closed, meaning that this development in connectivity makes collaboration easier.

The ability to share links to blogs, photos, and videos enables anyone to become an amateur photographer, author, or news broadcaster. Just as anyone can edit an article on the open-source encyclopedia Wikipedia, any tweeter's or blogger's thoughts can be acknowledged. Peer-based production can be evidenced in this medium (Benkler, 2006). These social media tools allow users to establish trust those with whom they are interacting (Zhao, 2009). Twitter and blogs are effective tools to deepen that sense of connectedness that followers have toward each other and an organization (Zhao, 2009). It is a participatory culture where people share positive feedback, disappointments or new ideas in the public arena.

Tools such as microblogging or blogging might then be weighed as potential options to increase the sense of connectedness, collaboration, and information sharing for that community (Zhao, 2009, p. 250; Wenger et al., 2009, p. 15). It expands the way we can interact with others. Such a platform may facilitate a common understanding, help create a community operated by common virtues, and affirm homophily. When shared common meanings can be created, the communication can be more rewarding for all participants. "The objective of skilled agency and collaboration in the study of the human condition is to achieve not unanimity, but more consciousness. And more consciousness always implies more diversity" (Bruner, 1996, p. 97). A detailed explanation of blogging and microblogging follows.

Blogs

Blogging is an asynchronous collaboration platform that is mobile, instant, and accessible anytime. Blogging platforms such as Wordpress, Blogspot, and Blogger allow new posts to be created anywhere one can connect to internet. Blogging is a tool of one-to-many connections and facilitates awareness in an ambient and intimate way (Ryan, Hazelwood & Makice, 2008, p. 2). Recipients of a blog are able to subscribe automatic updates to follow future blog posts. Clive Thompson (2008) described it thus: "Each little update—each individual bit of social information—is insignificant on its own, even supremely mundane. But taken together, over time, the little snippets coalesce into a surprisingly sophisticated portrait…, like thousands of dots making a pointillist painting" (Blog, The Project Wall, 2011).

Microblogs: Twitter

Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service that allows users to post short messages (tweets) to audiences (followers) who subscribe to receive them. Invented for small group conversation by Jack Dorsey, also defined it as "a short burst of inconsequential information,' much like "chirps from birds"—which was precisely what the product was (Sano, 2009).

The real-time information network of Twitter is used by over 100 million users, half of whom log in daily (CBC, 2011). Traffic exceeds 250 million tweets per day and continues to grow at an exponential rate. In a study on the intention of tweets, the diversity of activity can be categorized into four overarching categories: daily chatter, conversations, sharing information, and reporting news (Java et al., 2007). Across these categories, tweets often contained links to embedded media including articles, photos, and videos. Twitter affords an interaction that can point people to resources and information quickly (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 192).

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Users have the option of posting a **public** tweet for followers to read; communicating to a **specific individual** using @user syntax; conducting **private** conversations as a Direct Message; or embedding hashtags (a "#" symbol) to allow others to follow **related content** about a particular topic. It is a folksonomic "bottom-up user-proposed tagging convention" (Chang, 2011, p. 5) that enables users to organize their content. It also includes retweets ("RT"). Retweeting is the act of sharing and amplifying—taking an existing thought and broadcasting it to one's own followers. boyd, Golder and Lotan argued that retweeting contributes to a "conversational ecology" where doing so demonstrates participation and offers validation for what has been said (2010, p. 1).

Discussions around Twitter are closely tied with the increasing trend of mobile communications. The conversational architecture and SMS (short messaging service) contributed to the success and versatility of the platform and enabled "instant communities" (Castells, 2000). SMS functionality allows users to be offline and continue to engage in conversations through text messaging. Mobile communications enables individuals to access the global or local communications network anywhere, anytime. This digital space, the Twittersphere, created a repository for these narratives to survive and imbricate. The low cost to collate and aggregate information has done away with the obstacles to sharing among people. What set this medium apart from others in the past was the creation of a permanent public space for information.

Every tweeter has the potential to be heard. Benkler's (2006) peer-based production can be evidenced in this medium. This technology is not mediated by hierarchy, it is peer to peer. We now network our expertise, leveraging our knowledge through connections. The platform of microblogging can be understood as offering a wider unfiltered scope of opinion, increasing the aperture of our collective thoughts.

Blogs and Microblogs as Knowledge Management Systems

The blogging and microblogging platforms have taken on a connectionist function, one of the defining characteristics of a knowledge management system. Skok and Kalmanovitch (2004) evaluated the role of a workplace intranet to facilitate knowledge management ("KM"). Using Skok and Kalmanovitch's (2004) classification of functionality, blogging and microblogging demonstrated cognitivistic, connectionistic, and autopoietic aspects.

Cognitivistic

A blog or microblog can act as a repository to house and manage information, storing many updates. Features like categories and tags create a bottom up taxonomic searchable database. One can create a permanent record of their journey, both from a professional development and personal growth perspective.

Connectionistic

As a tool that connects and builds networks, blogs push unfiltered information to the public for a wide audience. This varies from past platforms of emails, telephone calls, and letters, which are a one–to-one form of communication. An example of its one–to-many reach is evidenced by the teacher exchange blog by Miles McFarlane in Manitoba, Canada (Appendix A). McFarlane (2012) documented his teacher exchange application process, organizing and archiving valuable explicit and tacit knowledge. As an experienced blogger, he used tag clouds and categories, and he tweeted his blog posts on Twitter. This tacit knowledge is articulated through dialogue (Nonaka, 1994, p. 12). As a tool of connection, the blog can provide important news, events, and announcements. It can also act as a directory, linking to important sites and to other teacher exchange bloggers. McFarlane also employed a blogroll. This feature allows

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bloggers to collect others' blog posts and give the blogging platform an increasingly participative nature. People and text are brought into closer proximity (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 64). These functionalities move the blog from a centralized to a more distributed publishing model.

Blogs that connect around a particular subject tend to have a networked structure. However, the repeated back and forth among other blogs and the creation of embedded links to other people's blogs changed the nature of the platform from a network to a community. The blog was no longer simply a tool to publish a voice, it was a way to connect and participate with others. One example of this in the field of education is Edubloggers. A shareable RSS ("Really Simple Syndication") code was developed by Stephen Downes to collect disparate blogs in the education community that wished to connect across educational interests (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 63).

The IEEP program promoted blogging during their teacher exchange to their participants. During a pre-departure orientation, participants set up a blog dedicated to their exchange. Some relevant blog postings (Appendix A) were shared with the group, as well as a listing of blogs from past participants (Appendix B). This allowed participants to use the blog as an acculturation tool, a coping mechanism to transition, adapt and feel connected as they started their journey together. Marwick (2001) referenced the importance of shared experiences to establish trust and to have common references among a group (p. 817). Although they may be teaching across continents, they can communicate with their cohort members anytime and anywhere they wish. It can serve as a tool for educational professionals to reflect on their tacit knowledge and to gain and manage both explicit and tacit knowledge.

Autopoietic

Autopoiesis (Skok & Kamanovitch, 2004) in this context refers to the social construction of knowledge, and is embodied in the individual. The autopoietic function of this tool, the ability of tweets to recreate themselves through subsequent modifications, was another strong point of these technologies. Others were able to comment on the blog, reply or retweet, making it an important feedback tool that could effectively generate appreciation and recognition. It served as a motivator to blog or tweet knowing that content was useful to others in the community of practice. It went well beyond the scope of a diary, as the networked aspect of the blog and Twitter feed made the author's material scalable from one to many. Such collaborative activities permitted group epistemic work that promoted the creation of new knowledge (Cook & Brown 1999; Nonaka, 1994). Tacit epistemic work occurs through socialization and externalization (Nonaka, 1994, p. 20) and the blog is a vehicle by which this process can be accomplished.

Along the same three theoretical constructs (cognitivisitic, connectionistic, and autopoietic) of Skok and Kalmanovitch (2004) was the work put forth by Edwards, Shaw and Collier (2005). They categorized KM structural tendencies that were either process based, workshop based, or took on the notion of journey making. Journey making and autopoietic functionality shared many elements where the interactions favoured critical reflection and collective learning, both being KM bottom-up strategies.

Blogging is often thought of as journaling technology, but it also assists people who have something in common to contact each other, network, and possibly form a new community. It opens a virtual space to learn together. When a teacher on exchange had read another exchange teacher's blog, each recognizes the other as being part of the same community of practice. They then participated expecting that the content would speak to their own experience of practice.

Even if they merely lurked on other teacher exchange blog, or viewed tweets without responding, they engaged peripherally, and rich learning was accomplished. Often, lurkers were familiarizing themselves with the community before engaging with it, deciding if they shared a common identity.

These types of blogging permitted an autopoietic repository of narratives and information and were conducive to reflection, collaboration, and sharing of explicit and tacit knowledge. It was an appropriate tool for the field of education practitioners and thus a valid platform that acted as a knowledge management system (KMS). The blogging platform functioned as a vehicle for disparate members of a teaching community to document, share, and learn from their overseas sojourns. Explicit and tacit knowledge were exchanged within this community of educators, aiding teachers to interpret data to create new meaning from their teaching exchange to determine best practices and develop new competencies.

An analysis of blogging technology through the lens of knowledge management provided rationale for implementing blog usage in international educational programming. The analysis gave a robust understanding of the technology. Rather than the international teacher exchange becoming a very individualized experience where this knowledge risks being lost with the individual, knowledge is retained and permanently recorded within these connected blogs and tweets.

Chapter Summary

The body of knowledge across the research literature in this area of international education, intercultural theory, and technology platforms can act as a basis for the formation and

building of community. Knowledge management serves as a theoretical framework that merits further research within the context of practitioners taking their vocation abroad.

Blogging platforms enable the development of individual exchange teacher experiences into uniquely networked communities of learning and sharing ad hoc knowledge. The micro-exchange of knowledge ranged from ambient awareness to productive and participatory collaboration, and the KM of explicit and tacit knowledge. Blogs can promote the interactive building and dissemination of epistemic, tacit and explicit knowledge to provide a kaleidoscope view of the world as a global citizen. Improving information retrieval may help leverage the ability to draw insights from the educational landscape on an international level.

Significance of the literature review

A review of the literature identified key work in the field of communications and international education that can be contextualized within a teacher exchange framework. These important pieces added to the body of knowledge surrounding educators who apply their vocation in a different country while on exchange.

On one level, information and theory brings together the disciplines of social media communications, international education, and education in a constructivist ontology that permits a look ahead to a future of networked educators on exchange and to future consequences of communication media in the context of human history. Framing the research literature through these trans-disciplinary lenses allowed a widened scope of discourse, and it enabled me as a researcher to link different ways of thinking, and to consider how best to leverage technology in order to maximize teacher exchange. Examination through the lenses of these domains may make it possible for teacher exchange to play a prominent role in these research fields.

Deconstruction of the exchange experience from a cultural competency and technological vantage will assist to maximize the opportunities that exchanges present educationally, culturally, and economically on a global scale.

The study of teacher exchanges within a larger theoretical framework allows for the application of analytical principles of valid research in these fields. It showcased Alberta's educational system on the international stage, and promoted active and responsible global engagement to share best practices.

The review resulted in a distinctive contribution to the research area of teacher exchanges in two significant ways. First, it addressed a substantial research gap in teacher exchanges and originality in spanning research fields, creating new areas for critical discussion. Second, province-wide international initiatives were highlighted, recognizing teacher exchange as an important contribution to responsible global citizenship and international education in a networked world. The review of the interplay of social media on teachers' experiences abroad demonstrated the relevance of technology when establishing effective practices while teaching abroad. The integration of the fields of international education and the use of social media, that has resulted in a novel way to theorize teacher exchange.

Abstracting the teacher exchange process allows vigorous investigation of how the various parts fit together in a coherent global picture. It creates the basis upon which to theorize novel approaches and practices to enhance this international educational opportunity to develop 21st century competencies.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This subject-centred research design was qualitative constructivist (Mertens, 2000) and is based on the belief that reality is constructed. It emerges out of interaction with others and the world. A constructed reality means that it was viewed through the lens of a culture, and placed within a certain moment in time and history. The reality experienced was based on interpretation of personal experiences within a specific historical, societal, and cultural context. It was therefore value laden and sensitive to context. Because it took place within a particular context, meaning was also created as a collective. The examination of past participants' experiences was a reconstruction of reality. The interpretation and reconstruction of reality resulted in meaning making and assignment of structure to these impressions and experiences. The constructivist approach described the sequence to connect claims, data, and warrants for this research study and took an open approach, with no pre-structured models. The narrative at the beginning of this study underlined the subjective reflexivity of the researcher and an attempt to remain cognisant of any biases. The aim was to understand better the junction of teacher exchanges, intercultural competency, and social media, not to measure them (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 45).

Multiple data source triangulation was employed. Multiple sources were used to compensate for weaknesses and verify the hypotheses made. Self-report data obtained through eight in-depth interviews was analysed. The analysis proceeded from specific deconstructed data to more general categories and theories. By using more than one source, the range of subjective viewpoints was greater. The understandings generated in the findings were greater and gave a deeper understanding of the wider group of the social constructions of international exchange participants. Different insights enriched the current understanding of this labour force in

international situations, particularly regarding use of social media to enhance an exchange experience.

Warrants made to evaluate the data gained from the interviews were based on a discovery paradigm and arguments made to explore possible program enhancements through the use of social media. To evaluate the evidence, this study focused on measurement validity (Merrigan, Huston & Johnston, 2012, p. 100).

Data Collection

Primary source self-report data was gathered through an in-person or telephone interview, facilitated by a digital voice recording. The self-report provided unmediated evidence of behaviour, beliefs, and characteristics relevant to the research topic. The recordings were transcribed, at which time the interviewees were assigned a pseudonym. Other identifiable markers such as the interviewee's home and host location, school, and state were also removed to maintain anonymity. Data were collected over a three-week period from April 15 to May 7, 2013.

Strategies for Data Collection

Specific participants were targeted to volunteer for the study (Appendix D) in a purposive sampling. The sample frame was 35 members. Each of these teachers had an equal chance of being selected, based on responding to the research request.

The qualifications were to have completed a year-long teacher exchange program with the Alberta IEEP to Australia during the years 2011and 2012. This sampling was chosen to have teacher exchange participants who were recently returned from their experience. Sampling teachers across two years also represented more fully the population being investigated.

The use of a blog or a Twitter feed while on exchange was useful but not mandatory for participation in the research project, and this was outlined in the letter of invitation to potential participants (Appendix D). The yearly population of Alberta teachers who have participated in a year-long exchange to Australia was small, between 10 and 25, so it was necessary to open up the data sampling to include two years of program participants to obtain a robust representative sample.

Selection Method

An email was sent to all thirty-five 2011 and 2012 IEEP teacher exchange program participants inviting volunteers for the research study. Of the 35 teachers invited, 8 volunteered to participate and were interviewed. I accept that the sample may not be representative of the population, and there are potential biases that could be encountered by this method of data sampling.

Semi-Structured Interview Format

Semi-structured personal interviews (Merrigan et al., 2012) were utilized as the research instrument to get in-depth responses. The method of qualitative analysis employed was a fixed qualitative analysis, following a fixed research design. The self-report format of interviews provided rich data and allowed participants to comment and disclose their own behaviours and beliefs toward social media usage and the teacher exchange experience. The interview questions were limited to twenty and a timeframe of sixty minutes was set. Extra time was allotted for further elaborations.

The survey format of the interviews was semi-structured and an interview guide was created (Appendix C). A personal interview style was employed, with the purpose of creating an

atmosphere of trust. Participants would thereby be more inclined to answer all the questions and to answer more fully than questions delivered in a written format. Direct interaction between the interviewer and interviewee helped in accessing more information and in probing more deeply when appropriate.

The semi-structured interviews followed a discussion guide, rather than adhering to a structured format which would have dictated that all questions and their wording remain identical for each participant. In the informal interview setting, the flow of conversation was less interrupted by a semi-structured format. In this sense, the interviewee took the lead on the conversation and, while expanding on certain discussion topics, revealed new avenues for discussion. A structured format would not have allowed for clarification or explanation of questions. It was determined that it was important to have participants feel free to ask for further clarification, particularly regarding their familiarity with different types of social media. The interview guide focused on the participant's understanding of each experience or concept. Questions consisted of a mix of open-ended, closed-format, filter, and contingency questions. Certain questions were designed to screen participant responses to ensure only relevant data was collected.

Data Analysis

The analysis focused on the descriptive thematic content of the transcripts provided by eight international exchange teachers, who spent one year overseas teaching in Australia between 2011 and 2012. The focus of the analysis was on the text produced while documenting the narrative of these educators. The data analysis was a textual analysis (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 61). The constructivist approach taken in this study is described in the following sections and the analysis adhered to this process.

Deconstruction

Data was de-contextualized and converted into smaller bits of meaning. Text was identified and highlighted across the eight transcribed interviews according to themes. Analyzing the text facilitated a deeper understanding of the observable facts and trends across the subjects, and involved a reflective assessment of the contextual realities of the teacher exchange participants. The reconstructed constituents of the text were examined within a social setting and potential meanings were assigned to become informed on the framework of the phenomenon. This placed the group of teachers within a wider setting of technology and their location in relation to their adoption of social media technologies.

Rather than shedding the cultural and historical elements, the data was analyzed contextually. The deconstruction of the data permitted inductive qualitative research, starting from specifics and broadening the perspective to findings reflective of a larger group than the eight subjects surveyed. The de-contextualized parts of the texts were then integrated into new constructs.

Study Trustworthiness

Self-reported data is by nature subject to bias. People may not choose to disclose all their feelings and thoughts. There can be a variety of fears: disclosure, loss of employment, offending the host country and host educational system, defaming the exchange partner or host school colleagues, and compromising future exchange opportunities are just a few possibilities relevant to this research context. For example, if the teacher felt that speaking negatively of his/her school system may somehow compromise employability within the home school district, such comments would naturally be omitted in the interview setting. Since I am the study coordinator,

their comments could potentially be identified and pointed out, reflecting poorly on the study participant.

Of particular note is the fact that I was the coordinator of the International Education Exchange Program, and I therefore have an assumed relationship with the interviewee as potential candidate for a future exchange. Two cohorts completed their exchange prior to me taking on this role, so I did not have prior contact with this group. Even so, given these conditions, the exchange experience risked being presented in an overly favourable manner, with the subjects overemphasizing their use and knowledge of social media to present themselves as appropriate future candidates. Negative experiences may not have been shared as openly, as they may not have wished to be perceived as complaining about the program or different education systems. Difficulties and challenges may also have been minimized so as not to be criticized by their peer group, should results be published or shared at a future date.

It should also be noted that these self-reports were from past experiences and recollection of these experiences can be affected over time, both in the quality of details and the lens through which they now regard their teacher exchange experience. For example, someone who had a few negative experiences while overseas may choose, knowingly or unknowingly, to interpret the entire experience negatively, including any social media usage experiences at the time. Or the positives may have outweighed the negative aspects, as they considered the experience on the whole and distanced themselves from the situation.

Validation in Qualitative Research

Given that the study involved volunteer participation, it could have been biased in that only teachers who had a positive experience, both with teaching and social media usage while

abroad, would have raised their hands to be a part of the study. Exchange teachers who encountered assimilation difficulties may have chosen to remain silent. Those with little social media knowledge may also be reluctant to participate, so as not to reveal their inexperience or negative attitudes towards technology. The study, therefore, may not be representative of all exchange teachers.

Another bias that may have entered into the data selection was the type of participant. I would hypothesize that only the most successful exchange teachers would have volunteered to participate in the study or, at the other end of the spectrum, those who might have had malicious intent to denounce the teacher exchange initiative or social media in general. A disgruntled individual who had an adverse situation occur while on exchange may be looking for a public outlet to denounce or criticize the program and/or social media. Thus, the population represented may be one of extremes—intense satisfaction or intense dissatisfaction. It would not be likely that this would be a venue for an unhappy participant to voice his/her complaints, but this was a possible area for bias that warranted being noted.

It was emphasized that this study was purely for research purposes and that anonymity would be provided. In addition, the sample was not a vulnerable population; participants were very capable of ending the interview or withdrawing from the study at any point.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to transfer insights from one study to other participants, texts or settings (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 93).

Ethical Considerations

Data collection occurred with informed participant consent, and all participation was voluntary. The process of participation was outlined in the information letter and consent form (Appendix D). Study procedures were explained. They had been approached as Alberta exchange teachers who had been on an international exchange in 2011 or 2012. The interview session lasted approximately one hour. Their time commitment to this study comprised a short briefing prior to the interview, an hour-long interview, and travel time.

Benefits and risks were identified. Benefits that may have arisen from participation in the study included the opportunity to reflect on the effect of a teacher exchange experience and the role technology played in the experience. It was explained that the information gleaned from this study may assist members of the teaching profession better understand the effects of teacher exchange and the benefits related to professional knowledge and practice.

Voluntary participation was explained, and subjects were told that they were not obliged to answer any specific questions, even while participating in the interview. They were able to opt out without penalty and could have asked, for up to one month after the interview, that data they provided be withdrawn from the database and not included in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were detailed as well as the intended uses of the research. It was explained that the plan for this study had been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a research ethics board at the University of Alberta.

Chapter Summary

      A qualitative purposive constructivist research design was chosen. Data collection was detailed as a semi-structured self-report interview with the data sampling set spread over two years of recently returned teacher exchange participants to increase applicability of findings across a greater population. All eight participants who responded to the invitation for volunteers were interviewed for the sample. The survey interview was composed of several types of questions and used a semi-structured personal style to maximize discussion and put participants at ease. Data analysis deconstructed the text to create claims and develop theories and new constructs. Study trustworthiness was discussed as were ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected through the eight interviews of recently returned exchange teachers. In creating an in-depth picture of the deconstructed findings, two main themes appeared: support and control. The organization of support acts as a subset for the theme of control. The following section adheres to the following thematic format: First introducing the theme of networked narratives, then moving to the theme of supports, and ending with the theme of the teacher exchange experience. Exploring them in depth according to this structure will be important in order to consider the research questions posed.

The networked narrative of the blogging and tweeting platforms were a closed, informal, and time-limited support. Instead of presenting an interactive space for exchanging professional knowledge, the technology was employed as a tool to buffer against the stresses and challenges of exchange. A dominant thread was the motivation for using social media by the participants. In attempting to understand the motivations for usage of a particular tool as a social support rather than as a professional development support, valuable data surfaced in terms of the group's familiarity with social media platforms and how the introduction of networked narratives was perceived. Certainly the blogs were a narrative, but were they truly networked, or simply an electronic scrapbook or diary?

I investigated the types of supports the technology afforded. The supports relied mainly on reinforcement of existing ties. There was a large variety of supports that the technology provided, but surprisingly, the supports had little to do with developing intercultural competency.

Throughout the analysis of the data, the theme of requirements for privacy and control were woven into the interviews, as a counterbalance to the unease and challenges of launching into the unknown. Technology supported an experience of togetherness and reduced the sense of isolation. These themes were framed by the participants' construct of teacher exchanges and their perception of what they unanimously termed as an eye opening experience. Exchange teachers spoke of the amazing opportunity to experience another system in a hands-on fashion, yet their actions suggested technology was used to create a safe network or wall. This, in effect, kept the new experiences at bay or at least lessened the shock of absorbing the new environment.

The surprising findings were that, for the most part, the technology acted to not only separate and differentiate the cultures but also to create a barrier of interaction that was limited to safe and known individuals, and not related to professional development. The findings concluded with the participants' reflections on the appropriateness of technology platforms during the teacher exchange experience. The findings from the rich data of the interviews coalesced into a larger picture that questions the ability of the blog and Twitter feed to network the teacher exchange perspective.

Networked Narratives

Blogs and microblogs have the ability to increase network interactions, to raise narratives to a level of networked dialogues that rise above temporal and spatial limitations to bring together people with common interests. Here, participants elaborated on their usage of these platforms during their teacher exchange with the intent to investigate the usefulness and appropriateness of social media to support and leverage their immersion experience on an intercultural, professional and personal level. The practitioners assessed their familiarity with the technology and how they used it in an overseas setting. Heightened awareness of platform

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functionality did not result in a more complex usage of the features. The blog and microblog were regarded as one-way insular communication tools to be used amongst known and trusted ties, bringing up notions of privacy and control. The blog and the microblog served as a buffer against the educators launching themselves into unknown territory. Teachers were then asked to suggest how best to harness the power of social media to benefit the exchange experience.

Familiarity with Technology Platforms

Participants were asked about their technology use while away on teacher exchange. If they had blogged or tweeted, an attempt was made to establish their awareness of these platforms. Amy revealed her perception of herself as a non-expert when it comes to social media:

> the only reason that I started with Twitter was -- I was completely against it and
> had no idea what the point of it was, and couldn't really understand why people
> bothered .. I'm not really a big social media person, in my own mind at least
> (Interview)

Greg echoed the representation of himself as an "old school" user of technology:

> I think there's obviously a lot of really good things out there. And I probably first
> just need to learn about them more, and probably decide on accessing them. But at
> the same time, it's personal. I'm okay to keep the simple things that I know about,
> such as email and Skype. …I'm not into blogging or tweeting here within Canada,
> so it didn't really change anything, being overseas… (Interview)

Although there was a wide range of expertise with the technologies of blogging and tweeting, six of the study subjects had not blogged or tweeted prior to going on exchange. The

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blog and Twitter platforms as communication tools were used according to their concept of and knowledge of the platform, and their familiarity with a variety of applications was illuminated by their comments. There was a certain degree of ambient awareness of the tools—some members chose to engage with the same tools that others had used, based on successful implementation by others. If they had been on a colleague's blog, it served to familiarize them with the layout and functions. Ethan

> wasn't familiar with it enough to do that, and [I] thought that with Facebook and my personal blog that was probably enough. So it didn't really occur to me to do it, actually. (Interview)

Even if the participants had knowledge of advanced features, there was a common theme of confusion and a sense of being overwhelmed. Users asked, "*What* is this, and *why*?" (Amy, Interview). Frustrations led to forgetting to tag their posts, abandoning attempts to master the platform, and forcing teachers to "post something and then walk away from it" without delving into the technology beyond a surface level. Amy commented that "I still don't get it" and that the tagging feature of Twitter "didn't draw me in," revealing the limits both of sense-making and of the ability of the platform to engage its user. The lack of familiarity expressed by the participants underlined the lack of understanding of the purpose of certain features. If they could not be easily mastered or gain relevance quickly, the features were judged to be impractical and unhelpful, and were not utilized.

Motivation

The motives for employing the tool revealed participant conceptualization of the technology. Despite a blog and microblog having the capability of being two-way conversation

tools, it was primarily identified as a one-way communication tool to reach a larger audience, to disseminate information (Barb, Interview). Barb reported blogging "as a tool for me to get information out to family" (Interview). In this way, the teachers realized blogs and tweets were capable of amplifying their narrative, but the following passages demonstrated that their construct of the tools was of one-way communication. It was a way to push out information effectively to many people at the same time. Some members made it evident that the blog was the metaphorical equivalent of a virtual journal, a cognitivistic record of a chapter in their lives, or a reflective scrapbook for their enjoyment. "The blog was more like a diary for me" (Barb), and "flipping through a scrapbook" (Chad). It was a tool that served to bookend their overseas experience with a definitive beginning and end.

Participants demonstrated a construction of the blog as repository or container for information, a permanent record of their time overseas. The blog functioned as a way to update family and friends back home, as an expanded and virtual email message. Donna commented more deeply on the possibility of creating a two-way communication tool, and had anticipated that posting to the blog would have solicited more responses than it did. This suggested a more complex awareness of the platform, but also hinted at the disconnect that existed in the reality of writing a blog. The creation of a posting on the blog did not imply that it would become a conversation. The post or tweet was simply out there in the blogosphere or Twittersphere, not necessarily read and/or responded to. This referenced the autopoietic function of a blog to transmit feedback and appreciation. Donna was disappointed by the lack of reciprocity,

> and that's the one thing that we find sometimes discouraging. A lot of blogs put
>
> things on but no one will ever post back, at least, our friends don't ever say
>
> anything on there. So we never really knew how many people were actually

looking at it. If we knew that when we were there, I think we would have posted a

lot more. (Interview)

Interestingly, Donna sensed the irony of reciprocity and the notion of autopoeity- the

expectation of comments without first reaching out to others to engage in a virtual dialogue.

"Well, I guess this is a little bit of a Catch 22, what I was just saying; no one commented *yet*.

When we looked at those other people, we never commented, as well" (Interview).

The more users know about the platform the more they can use it to full potential. Being

aware of the features can permit optimization of their sites and implementation of useful

information architecture. Overall, there was not a prominent or deliberate attempt to use the blog

or microblog platforms as a knowledge management system to increase knowledge flow on a

professional level. This could be attributed to the familiarity with the features of the platform and

the motivations of its users. Knowledge management technologies need to be appropriate to the

target audience and must match the norms of practitioners living abroad. The system of blogging

interactions has the potential to optimize educational knowledge flow that could benefit this

globalized community of practitioners but, as yet, remains untapped.

If the user is mainly interested in employing a blog or Twitter feed for a travel diary for

family and friends, the regular use of advanced features such as tags and blogrolls are not likely

to be sustained because the motivation is to keep messages confined to a small audience, not to

further the reach of the content or connect with others outside of their usual network.

Support

Next, I investigated the motivations of exchange teachers in relation to their use of social

media while on exchange. Several commonalities emerged, the least common of which related to

blogs and tweets supporting intercultural competency and teaching exchange knowledge, and the most common of which related to informal social support that emphasized privacy. The networks that were created within the technology mostly involved the strengthening of existing ties rather than reaching out to create new ones. Support as a professional development tool is another element we discussed, and I attempted to provide plausible explanations for its paucity across the content of the blogs based on the interview data.

Intercultural Competency Support

There was a mix of findings regarding the participants' perception of the blog's or microblog's ability to help them recognize cultural differences. Some teachers expressed that they did not feel that blogging or microblogging contributed to their intercultural competency at all. Amy found that "in terms of immersing myself in the culture of Australia or the city or the state I was in, it [blogging] was kind of what helped take me out of that" (Interview).

The blog was employed for noting cultural values and norms much like a camera is used for recording images. Whether they knew it or not, the educators were capturing differences. One teacher, Hannah, remarked on the differences in her life overseas. She even made the point of making a blog post about the differences between the educational systems:

So I did detail for my Canadian teachers all the things that I found different, and that stood out for me in my practice in the things I observed in teaching in a year from Australia. And actually both my Canadian teachers and my Australian teachers found that really interesting. (Interview)

This demonstrated a level of reconstruction of the experience for others back at home, taking in patterns and norms from abroad that were distinctive to that region or culture. As the

teacher stated, a certain ambient awareness set in and she was able to theorize the entire experience on a deeper level. There was evidence of increased consciousness of perceptions and constructs of the host culture.

Social Media Platforms Supporting Professional Knowledge

Blog content from the participants demonstrated the platform's ability to document and organize teacher exchange experiences and insights. The insights dealt overwhelmingly with the experience on a personal level rather than on a professional level. The interviews revealed that this was a purposeful and conscious choice. For reasons of privacy and trust, participants kept blog and microblog conversations about school life and the exchange experience as a practitioner abroad to a minimum.

Information Support

Hannah commented on the multiple functions of the blog, serving not only to assuage some of the emotional challenges but also as a source of advice and information, a place to seek assistance when required:

> Yes, it definitely did help us to feel more comfortable. I think it allowed us to
> laugh at a lot of things that we were experiencing, and made us see, sometimes,
> the humour in it. As well, as we were there in Australia longer my Australia
> friends began to post on our blog as well. And that was kind of fun because I got
> their insight and they sometimes helped us out with different things, solved
> situations, shared tips and things we should do and places we should go. So it
> became kind of a place we could also get assistance if we wanted to. (Interview)

The Alberta teachers on exchange did not have much blog interaction with other

exchange teachers from their Alberta cohort while overseas, or with their home school divisions.

Amy made the claim that she "realistically had very little contact with my people professionally

back home" (Interview), and Barb agreed that "it was totally separate from teaching' (Interview).

This separation of personal and professional content was a thought-provoking finding. It

appeared that all the educators were aware of larger implications and therefore did not blog about

their students, schools, or classrooms. They self-censored and this prevented deliberations on

professional development. In addition, the norm and importance of privacy were woven

throughout the interviews. It was perceived by the teachers that the posts could not enter the

professional realm considering the open platform of blogging or tweeting. Participants revealed

that they were very sensitive to posting any school- or student-related content online. They also

did not want to offend, and avoidance of sensitive topics was a deliberate choice. Participants

went on at length about tailoring their blogs appropriately. Chad elaborated on the distinctions:

> I think that's like personal nature. I don't feel comfortable. I don't feel right
>
> sharing too much information about where I work, for just the respect of people
>
> involved in the work environment, and just being careful just not to cut into other
>
> people's privacy, so to speak. So if there was any reference made about things at
>
> school, it would be a picture of my class, or of my daughter who was attending
>
> this school, her uniform, or maybe the odd field trip we'd do with our class and it
>
> would be, again, mainly Australian countryside type of images, as opposed to any
>
> of the school setting itself because in a way I just felt that there was so much else
>
> to share, and most schools are quite similar. There was no need, or we didn't feel
>
> there was a need, to share too much. Plus I think, again, with the nature of my

wife and I, again, there's just so much we could say about our work setting

without having to maybe upset some of our colleagues at the time. But simply put,

I think that we were more excited about the experience away from work, and

work was just that. It was a job. And we just didn't feel there was a need to really

expand more on what we were doing because it was so similar to what we do back

home. (Interview)

Participants also hinted at the ambassadorial role the teacher exchange experience took

on, and at having to be very cautious about the content involving children. Ethan stated that

..venting about your occupation may be detrimental to your occupation if the

wrong person reads it. So you do have to be more careful what [you] say when

talking about the kids at school or my job. So, sometimes, it's easier just not to go

there in case you say something. And I also couldn't put any pictures of the kids

or anything up there, so sometimes it was easier just not to blog about that, where

I could use my personal life a little bit different…I was just worried about how

that would play between being an ambassador for Canada and for [Canadian

town], and that kind of thing. If I said something that was maybe wrong or

whatever. (Interview)

Hannah reiterated this notion:

Yes, it's a very conscious choice, and I think it is a bit of a stress for teachers

especially given the fact that students can actually find us and have proximity to

us on Facebook. You really have to know exactly how you want to deal with that,

and you have to make a very careful decision. Any students that I had, even when

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I was in Australia, any students I was corresponding with, weren't students that I was currently or would be currently teaching. It was students that were older, that had already left my school. (Interview)

Fiona echoed much the same concerns and brought into play the dynamic of being cognizant of the sometimes tenuous relationship with an exchange partner, having switched not only jobs but dwellings with them for a year:

I couldn't spell it out in all its honest truth because my exchange family were reading it. And they wanted the best for us, too. And a lot of my concerns or frustrations were regarding their home or their whatever, so I certainly wouldn't write about that in the blog. It was very tapered…No, I don't think my blog had much to do with my work, other than I tried to be very careful what I put on there with regard to school, because I didn't have the permission of the school's parents to put their children's pictures on, first of all. But I find that, in fact, on the blog I had to be very careful what I wrote because I didn't want to offend anyone in Australia or at home. So I tried to be honest, but at the same time if there was something I was upset about, it certainly wasn't going to go on the blog. (Interview)

This required a certain amount of empathy and ability to put him/herself into another person's place. Even though the blogs were, in principle, personal reflections of their sojourn, the exchange teachers effectively communicated their points of view to an audience belonging to a different cultural background. Hannah found it much more appropriate to approach the differences by poking fun at herself adapting to the changes, rather than pointing out stark

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differences in a negative way. The manner in which the Albertan teacher comported him/herself online demonstrated meta-communicative competence, trying to analyse and externalize the virtual conversation to avoid offending members and the education system of the host culture. Careful screening took place as the exchange teachers tapered their posts appropriately and constructively controlled the situation.

The tapered posts had an unintended effect—it forced the exchange teacher to refrain from dwelling on and spiralling into the negative. They presented the challenging situation as a positive learning experience and concentrated on what was going well. This reframing can be demonstrated here by several exchange teachers, beginning with Amy:

> For instance, there was one day where I thought everything was going wrong and blah-blah-blah. But once I started blogging and looking back at my pictures, I realized it was a really good day. And then I started thinking about teaching and sometimes we get wrapped up in the bad things of the kids or whatever, but it might actually be a good day. So, again, it just allowed me that time to think about my teaching in a different way… And it also helped to make sure that I focused on the positives of things. Because, of course, people reading my blog thought that I had just had the most incredible year, which I did. Every trip that I took and every event that did was magnificent, and even the negative professional aspects of things had the positive side of them. So writing those things made me have to make sure I put everything within the lens of positive or learning, and the things that I had gained from all my experiences. (Interview)

Hannah echoed these same thoughts:

But I definitely learned that it was really important to not say anything negative, whether it was about Australia in general or specifically something going on, because it just made people feel kind of like they had to defend their country, or whatever it was that I felt like, [it] was confusing to me. So I learned that it was way better to use a lot of humour and kind of poke fun at myself. That was a more enjoyable process. (Interview)

Social and Emotional Support

Social support is the perception that one is cared for and is part of a supportive social network. Support can relate to emotions, information or a sense of belonging. Across the blogs from this group of Albertan exchange teachers, the primary function was to keep them in close contact with their family and friends back home. The passages highlighted three main categories of social supports: emotional, information, and privacy.

Emotional Support

Hannah remarked that she

did find it [blogging] really beneficial to support our teacher exchange. I thought first of all that it was really fun to be making almost a memoir of our travels and time. So I knew that it would be available when I got home, to just go back and look through and just enjoy those pictures and that writing. It's also a form of reflection and -- as I had to sometimes sit and think about how I wanted to express something or what was it that I was experiencing -- lots of times it allowed me to think through what was going on and how I really did feel about it, and what did I really want to say about it. So both of those things worked together. I think the

nice thing about it, as I said before, is just that it really allowed me to grow in my

personal relationships. But it was also, as we grew personally through using and

sharing … I think our own relationship grew and even my collaboration level

grew at school as well. (Interview)

Despite the fact that they were far from home for a significant amount of time, the blog

assisted in remaining emotionally connected to people from their home communities.

The emotional support lent by blogging and microblogging was of a very definite length.

Across all the participant data, use of the platform diminished over time. Long posts became

shorter updates, and the participants were aware that less traffic on their blog signalled a

contracted readership. The teacher was responsive to the audience's desire to read only snippets

and not get overwhelmed by too many images or too much content.

Initially, that was the big thing, was to really just post everything, and it seemed

to dwindle. I even wanted to make sure that there was a closure to it because there

were some parts that weren't being put on, and I insisted to my wife that we just

finish up a few pictures so that people know that we're on our way home, and

we're done in Australia, and it's.. a closure. And then that took a bit of effort. In

the end, kind of tie ups, just get a few more photos on there, just to say good-bye

to Australia, and we're heading home. (Chad, Interview)

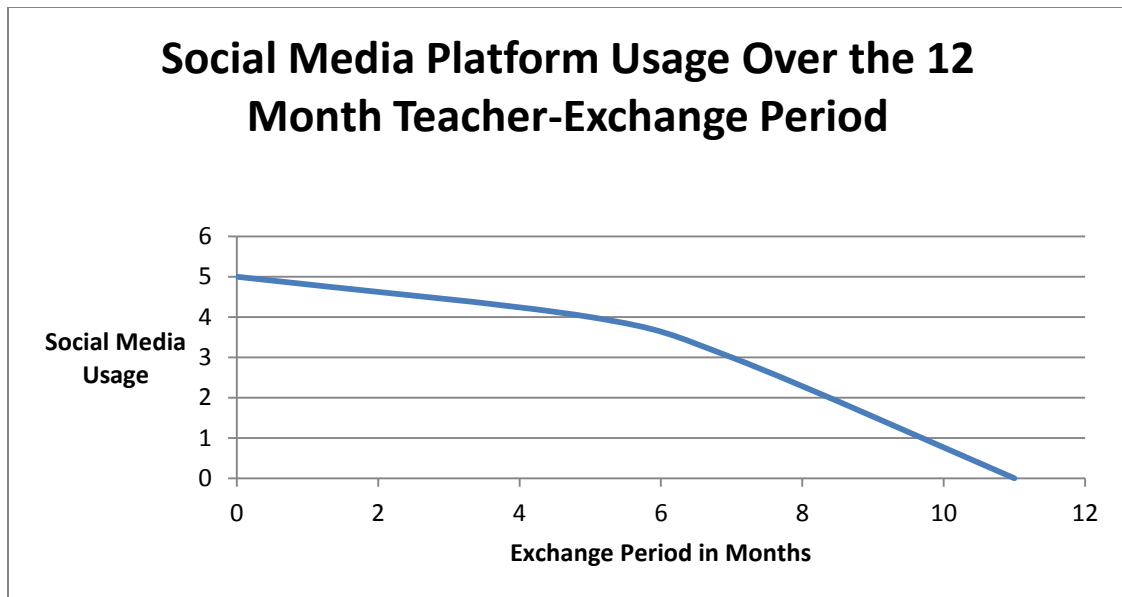**Social Media Platform Usage Over the 12 Month Teacher-Exchange Period**

Figure 5: Social media platform usage over the teacher exchange period.

This figure is representative shows the typical frequency of blogging and tweeting by the study's eight participants across their one-year teacher exchange period. The figure does not represent actual data, but is representative of the findings. The path was similar across the participants—high frequency at the outset followed by diminished usage. All platforms experienced an almost complete halt by the end of the teacher exchange.

Both Chad and Amy (individual Interviews) spoke of the construct of blog as a closed system—something with a defined start and end, marked by the teacher exchange). The usage followed their sojourn and ceased to have a purpose when they returned. The purpose of the platforms had a clearly defined lifespan and usefulness.

Privacy Support

One of the commonalities across the teacher exchange blogs was the mismatch in awareness of the reach of their blogs, a reference to the recurring thread of privacy. They tailored

the posts for a particular audience, and made the assumption that only that particular group had access to the blog. On one hand, they commented on their discomfort or reluctance to write about school related matters and then, on the other hand they are taken off guard by a colleague or stranger following their blog that contained personal details, interactions and reflections.

The following passages demonstrated their surprise when they found out the blog had reached out beyond their intended audience. Reactions to this realization of an enlarged network varied from amazement to distress. "And so complete strangers were starting to follow my travel blog and make comments on it, and it was so bizarre to me that that was happening" (Interview). Donna commented,

Well, it's kind of funny. You put up your blog and you're not really sure how many of your colleagues are actually reading it or checking it out. It wasn't until we got back that we found out a lot more were actually looking at it, and so I think they really were staying in touch that way. (Interview).

Ethan commented that, "some of the surprise is the random people who found your blog" (Interview), and Fiona remarked:

Lots of people commented on my blog. Some were former exchange people I don't know. They were strangers, and they would just leave comments saying, "This reminds me of when I was in Australia. You know, I have almost the same pictures." Or whatever. And others, it was funny. Lots of people from school -- teachers, coworkers, kids from both Australia and [School F] would leave comments. And then people I would never suspect, like parents of my friends, or my dad's best friend -- who is like 70 years old and my dad can't turn on a

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computer -- and this guy is leaving me messages on my blog. Really great! (Interview)

A particular situation arose that shocked Chad, one of the study participants. An anonymous follower commented on a blog post, specifically targeting a fellow Australian teaching colleague whose image appeared in the Albertan exchange teacher's blog. It demonstrated for the Albertan the requirement for privacy, as well as the need to monitor content for potential negative comments. This breech of privacy affected Chad's postings and was the only instance of a negative comment to a blog post across the eight research participants:

Actually, there was one and this was. interesting, because it was probably one-

third into the school year, I had the Principal basically pull me out of class and

say, "You know, you're going to have to contact your wife and take something off

the blog." And what had happened was, we went on a weekend excursion with a

colleague, swimming in a watering hole in a river and it was just two little sons,

and so we had a picture of him and myself and the boys splashing in the water.

We weren't aware that people could comment on blogs. We just thought that you

share, and people would comment when they like something but we ended up

getting a comment from someone we don't know, commenting on an individual,

like the colleague that I worked with, and slandering the colleague, and just

slandering him for something he had done in the past from a divorce or

something. And so the Principal was concerned that other people would see this

comment and gain information about this colleague or staff member of the school,

so he wanted the pictures and the comment removed as quick as possible so it

didn't cause problems in the community. So then, probably after that, we were just

very careful. Again, we don't know what people's pasts are, and we can't stop people from commenting but that was an issue that had come up, and that was the only issue really. (Interview)

An interesting discovery of this study was that despite the fact the teachers may have had a positive experience when someone from outside of their network commented on their blogs, they abstained from responding on blogs of people that they did not know. It was judged that there was an inherent lack of trust—they did not know these people. There was no guarantee of reciprocity in this situation. Chad stated, "I don't comment on people's blogs. I just watch. I'm old fashioned" (Interview). Ethan divulged that, if someone did comment on his blog,

> I wouldn't respond back to them because I guess I'm a big chicken and don't really trust, necessarily, that they might be good people. So that's fine if they're looking at my blog and following but I'm not going to just start up a random conversation with a random person. Does that make sense? (Interview)

In this sense, exchange teachers blogged with those with whom they had personal contact, and it was meant to tighten the bond of those who belonged in their circle of contacts. Contacts ranged from family, friends and/or colleagues, but very few blogs included followers from the host country. The Albertan bloggers preferred to limit their reach of followers to their local connections back in Canada. As Ethan commented, networking with the host community occurred more frequently in a face to face context; "I think more the face to face stuff throughout the year was what gave me the sense of community with the other teacher exchanges that were there, but not through the blogging" (Interview).

The extension of their home networks, if they did include other teachers who were concurrently on exchange, was excluded from anything other than observation. If they followed another exchange teacher's blog, they did not make comments on it to start an interaction. Fiona asserted:

> And I know there were other teachers from Alberta on exchange that had blogs like the [family on exchange]. I think it was [family on exchange] on Western Australia, and different people and, honestly, we were so busy living our own lives and doing our own things that I didn't have time to worry about what they were doing on the other side. So I found that there were no other teachers from Alberta exchange commenting on my blog while I was there, nor did I comment on theirs (Interview).

In fact, on Hannah's blog, if other exchange teachers made postings, she would send them a private message requesting the removal of the post, as this was a private site. Outsiders were welcome to view it, but not to contribute to it as they fell outside of her online community.

> Yes, the people had to be accepted into our group but, like other Facebook pages, people could share. They could choose to send something to us. But actually what happened is, a couple other exchange teachers, in the very beginning of my blog, started sending me different things and started posting them on that wall and I actually just contacted them with a private message and said that I would prefer that they didn't post directly on there, that I was going to do all the posting, and I was going to run it more like a controlled blog in that sense, and then that was great because they understood that. (Interview)

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Control

Control was a major factor in motivating their blogging while overseas. As demonstrated by Hannah's actions, there was a need to exert influence over their connectivity on social media and to direct others' behavior. Although there might have been a large amount of uncertainty in leaving behind their home school, community, and culture, the blog appeared to afford a level of power over their situation. This may be linked to social norms associated with educators in a position of leadership and possessing leadership personality traits (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010, p. 1295).

The interactions demonstrate a "desire to control the impressions other people form of them" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010 p. 62). The desire to control followers and content may have occurred in order to gain the reward of a positive impression of their exchange and maintain professional integrity.

Much of what is required to have a positive exchange is to be able to adapt quickly to new situations over which you have no influence. Modifying your teaching practices to fit in with a new jurisdiction and educational culture demands a great deal of flexibility. Amy demonstrated her awareness of her need for control:

> So when I had something else to challenge my brain, and it was a positive
> challenge that social media had presented, it created a new stressor in a different
> way that I wanted to stress me, as opposed to... that I was in control of. Maybe it
> was that there was that degree of control there. Whereas when things were
> happening at school with staff or parents or students, that you didn't feel, because
> you're new to the system, and you don't know all the avenues to take or if you had

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a problem student, or a problem with a staff member.. there's a very strict code

of.. conduct rules with the ATA, or how to approach a parent, or you know

exactly what staff member deals with the resource, or when you have a kid that

has ADHD you know that the first thing is to take them to.. get a WIAT done, or

whatever. Whereas there, I didn't necessarily know the avenues to take, or who to

ask, or if they even knew what I was talking about when I brought something up.

So it was just like a year of being completely out of control when, at home, I'm

quite in control of what I'm doing and I'm quite competent, and so that feeling like

you did something wrong everyday was tough. Whereas when you chose what

you were doing -- something went wrong and then, "Oops, I made a mistake on

the blog or on Twitter." It was like, "Oh, that's alright. Now I can go and fix it and

I know how to." So, yah, I think having control of the social media and who you

talk to and when, and whether or not you turned it off, to choose to be isolated, or

turned it on and there was always somebody online somewhere, or an email

coming, then that was good. (Interview)

The acculturative stresses of exchange appear to be lessened with the use of a blog. Amy

went on to describe a buffering effect that helped lessen the negative effects of that stress. The

blog and the microblog provided a public space to lighten the burden, and to find some humour

in her situation: "It was a way of getting me out, giving me that time out of Australia and out of

work" (Interview).

The exchange teachers also noted a sense of responsibility towards creating blog posts,

and that there was an expectation and a responsibility to provide updates. Whether the

expectation was self-imposed or could be attributed to members of their intended audience is

unclear. Amy revealed that she felt the need to share, regardless of whether the posts were being read or responded to. The teacher alluded to the stress of blogging as a sense of duty and obligation, a task to be completed within the teacher exchange. Amy remarked that "there was a degree of accountability, responsibility" (Interview). This accountability demonstrated that the user was engaged by the platform but also felt constrained by it, which led to an investigation on the appropriateness of the tool to aid in maximizing the international experience.

The Teacher Exchange Experience and Social Media

The perceived value of social platforms varied across this population and I thought it was important to explore this aspect from the exchange teacher's perspective. As a proponent of social media, it can be difficult for me to step outside my biases to appreciate how others view social media. I asked the teachers to analyze how they could have better shaped themselves to the tool, shaped the tool according to their needs, and made better use of it during their exchange period. Their hindsight provided suggestions as to how future exchange participants might maximize social media for their educational sojourns. Barb suggested that it may have been helpful to have

> started working on the blog prior to going, I would have been more aware of everything that you could do with the blog, rather than discovering it as I went along, so it could have quite possibly made it better. Maybe looking at different blog websites, because I know that the one that [exchange partner] used was different than the one that I used. (Interview)

Amy added that it would be useful to let future exchange teachers know how to employ various platforms to benefit the exchange:

I think those kinds of things is having the familiarity of how you could use them

in an exchange, because you don't want to necessarily try and think about those

things when you are comparing loads of other paper work and things that you

have to prepare and pack and clean before an exchange. (Interview)

Some study participants found that the blog was too lengthy for their audience. The

Facebook group site created by one of the study participants allowed for a hybridization of short

blog posts combined with status updates. This was the only collaborative group page that was

created by the 2012 cohort of exchange teachers, but it should be noted that the group page was

only intended for the teacher and immediate family to act as administrators, and that their posts

were restricted to them and their accepted contacts.

I just knew that in my own personal experience that I tend to look around on

Facebook more often. I'm really inclined to do that, more than I am [to] link to

another blog or another place on the web to read something…The structure and

the thing that we liked most about using the Facebook blog was that we didn't

have to have, each one of us, my two daughters and myself, all trying to post the

same pictures and the same stories on each of our individual pages, but rather we

could collaborate our effort and just run one page that we could control, because

we added the people to the group. We found it to be a really successful way to

interact, and really simple. We also feel like Facebook is a tool that a lot of people

are already using. But we found that, because our Facebook page was someplace

that people were already on all the time, we just got a lot of kind of instantaneous

feedback and a lot of fun things back and forth, simply because people were

already on that site. (Interview)

Two of the notable features of this hybridized blog were the privacy and control settings. Persons interested in following the posts had to be accepted as part of the group. In this way, privacy was assured from unwanted outside posts. Hannah explained that, "we got a notification that someone wants to be accepted into your group and I had to be one of the administrators that would accept them into the group" (Interview).

Hannah shaped the tool of the Facebook platform to enhance the blogging aspect and was able to control who followed and contributed to the site. She shaped her digital habitat to meet her needs of community connection (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 20). It suited her purpose of broadcasting to a large but controlled audience. This may have contributed to an increased sense of trust between the members on the Facebook page and allowed more freedom for individuals within this circle to contact each other. Facebook is a widely used platform for informal communication, and it may have been more widely accepted and followed because the audience was more familiar and comfortable with the platform.

Another participant, Hannah, who chose only to email and Skype while on exchange was equally satisfied with her choice of platform, stating that:

I just think it's a personal choice. I don't really have any desire to blog or tweet

because if I blog and tweet, a lot of people that I don't know or aren't relative to

the topic would comment. And if I was to share comments with anyone, I'd just

want to share them with the people that I would want to share with (Interview).

The choices of social media platforms varied across the participants in the study, and they demonstrated considerable ability to assess the advantages and drawbacks of that technology. This stands to provide valuable feedback for future participants of international teacher exchanges and could be applied to a variety of practitioners abroad.

Opening New Worlds

I sought to glean the participants' definitions of global education in terms of the teacher exchange experience. There were benefits consistently asserted by these practitioners: an eye-opening exercise in flexibility that enhanced one's practice by participating in another system, as well as an opportunity for reflection and refinement of teaching methods. However, throughout the data analysis, one finding persisted. Their perspective on international education was not mirrored in their use of technology—technology was a means to limit scopes of interaction whereas their construct of teacher exchange was meant to open up scopes of interaction and collaboration.

Amy described an international teacher exchange as an opportunity to gain knowledge of the international community and to gain new perspectives in order to weigh in on your own ways of doing and knowing. The international education initiative of teacher exchanges

> provide[d] a different experience and to put yourself out of your comfort zone in
>
> ways that you may not have realized that you were in a comfort zone, to enhance
>
> the understanding of what we have in Canada… So getting a different perspective
>
> on education, on life… and I mean really daily life of the students and yourself,
>
> are part of going to a classroom every day. So to have the entirely different
>
> perspective on all aspects of life, not just in the classroom or the school or the

system, was really valuable to see the positives and negatives of what we have

here, and helped to try to bring some of that into my teaching here and into the

system. …a whole eye-opening exposure to differences in all aspects of life was

valuable. (Interview)

The notion of taking your vocation globally reinforced an appreciation for pedagogical

practices in the home country, as well as inviting the possibility to adopt ways learned in the new

environment. By stepping outside of what is familiar, their scope of the educational world was

broadened, as asserted by Fiona and Greg, beyond their home system. Greg commented that a

teacher exchange is an entranceway that increases global awareness and

basically opens your eyes to a new country, a new culture, and different teaching

styles. I learned a lot about how school is run over there, like from the

administrative side to the teacher's roles, and teacher workload. It makes you

appreciate what you have here, teaching in Alberta. And just being able to open

your eyes to new things. (Interview)

So many of the research participants described the internationalization of their teaching

as eye-opening that I wanted to explore this metaphor. A widened aperture of educational

practices allows for a shift in focus, in attention. This opening presented an opportunity to

reconsider what is routine and conventional. The figurative meaning of opening one's eyes

relates to revelation and realization, discovery, and expectation. Globalization is an exercise in

discovery, in acquainting oneself with otherness. Contact and connections as citizens on a global

scale activated awareness and prompted a skills and practices inventory. Thus teacher exchanges

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were an exercise in global citizenship and allow one to take stock of individual's personal

educational skill sets, as well as the surrounding educational culture within which you operate.

Fiona expanded upon the insular nature of teaching and how an intense experience such

as an exchange allowed the educator to go deeper than a glimpse into another teacher's

classroom. Stepping back from familiar context invited theorization of her professional

development. Her observations underlined how the practitioner teaching abroad was able to get a

bird's eye view to create a larger framework of educational systems on a global scale:

> Sometimes we get so caught up.. professionally, we get caught up in our little
>
> world, whether that be our school or our school division, particularly doing what
>
> we're doing. And you need that bigger picture, and I don't think we get that
>
> opportunity, even within Alberta, to look at what other teachers are doing. And I
>
> know so many of us, if you go for a.. professional development day somewhere,
>
> often it's like snooping around in other teachers' classrooms, just to see what
>
> they're doing. This is just such an opening experience, seeing with other teachers
>
> on the other side of the world are doing. Are we doing similar things, or are they
>
> doing it better? Are we doing it better? How can we put those ideas together?
>
> Really, at the end of the day, we're not all that different at all, in fact. (Interview)

While Fiona focused her cultivation of a different perspective on the similarities of

systems, Barb focused her attention on differences and nuances in practices she could bring

home to enhance her current methods of teaching. Customary methods were explored in a new

light:

In a sense, you have to decide if you're going to do that in your new setting or you

have to look at the way they do things, and say, "Huh! Why would I do it that

way?" or "Why wouldn't I do it that way?" And so there was just a lot of

reflection in it. So, out of that, I felt like it was a very important learning

opportunity. As well, just an appreciation for things that are going in different

parts of the world. (Interview)

Going global with their vocation presented the difference between doing and telling. It

was the distinction between passive and active understanding. Barb highlighted this point,

comparing a lecture to direct experiential learning, that is, learning where one is actively

applying knowledge. It was learning by participation that made the difference in driving

internationalization home, giving it relevance and purpose:

It was probably the best professional development I ever had in my life…I

learned a lot about flexibility… I've always found myself to be a very flexible

person. …you can actually live what they do. So you have the opportunity to take

the time to assess rather than just sitting in on a meeting and someone telling you

how something is done. You actually get to live it. (Interview)

The teacher exchange experience was an experience to reach out across boundaries of

geography, politics, and disciplines. The exchange teachers had to adapt quickly to new systems

if they are to gain new insights and engage effectively with the host culture and education

system. Donna articulated the challenges and risks of shedding the comforts of known systems

and adopting a new perspective:

I think any time you put yourself in that kind of vulnerable position, I think you

really kind of gain from it. You know there are challenges, absolutely, and the

first few months you're kind of really nervous about all the things you're doing

and making sure you're doing them well, a good job, and from that you just come

out a lot stronger teacher… it just opened my eyes a lot more. (Interview)

The engagement in international perspectives created a space for reflection from which to

step out of their day-to-day situations and theorize their practice. With the help of her blog,

Hannah processed the global experience in terms of juxtaposing systems and rethinking the

reasons behind methodology implementation. The deconstruction of educational practices

occurred when the focus shifted to a new location within a different context. The educators

dissected how practices had been shaped, based on cultural educational norms when presented

with new ways of doing things. Traditional approaches were brought into question and rethought

once there was distance from constraints of local educational policy. While there may be

requirements to conform to new norms in the host culture, the process of decontextualizing

education had begun, as evidenced by Hannah's comments:

It forced me to really think about why I do the things I do, and not just see it as a

component of "this is the way my school does things" or "this is the way my

province does things," but actually [to] understand why I, as a teaching

professional, chose to approach--whether it was assessment, whether it was the

order I teach things, whether it was the type of task that I assigned--all of those

different decisions. I really had a lot of opportunity to have reflection on them.

(Interview)

Ethan articulated the ability of international initiatives to lead to greater connections and collaboration. The relationships developed give rise to a more detailed understanding of how Albertans fit into the global picture. Tackling an exchange launched the practitioner into the unfamiliar with the anticipation to create new ties:

> I think it helps us connect globally. We always talk about how we need to become
>
> global citizens and global learners and, when we just live in our own little
>
> bubbles, in our own little cities, we really don't have a good concept of what other
>
> places are like. Even exchanging to a different province would be good. But to go
>
> to a whole other country and just have those connections and that kind of thing, I
>
> just think, is awesome. (Interview)

However, as the interviews progressed, it became increasingly clear that the technology platforms were not places for intermingling on a global level or for transferring pedagogical knowledge. Rather, blogging and tweeting gave the exchange teacher a time-out from the intensity of their international experience, a virtual space to disengage from the immersion. Once the exchange teacher was well supported by their informal networks, it served to support the overall exchange experience. It would seem that a teacher that is happy outside of the classroom environment is happy and more adaptive in the classroom.

> I think it definitely supported. It supported -- and this is just my experience -- but
>
> it supported basically more our family life, and then kind of about our adventure
>
> as a family and that in turn, I think, kind of supports you on the whole exchange.
>
> (Donna, Interview)

Chapter Summary

The how and why of social media use while on an international teacher exchange have been deconstructed and placed into themes, revealing motivations, enthusiasm and hesitancy for the platforms the eight study participants chose. Key learnings from the data include themes or support and control that were found throughout the eight interviews. Motivations for blogging and tweeting remained confined to a one-way communication tool in the most cases, to push out information to a very defined audience. Participants were caught off guard if the audience was comprised of individuals with whom they did not have a certain degree of familiarity with. Although the blog and micro blogs had the potential to scale collaborations, it was found that the tools were used more in the sense of connecting the exchange participants to the safe and familiar. Although the tools were effective in triggering reflection, the platform usage was limited to informal support rather than professional development. The blogging platform was hybridized in one case, utilizing a Facebook group page with tight controls to ensure privacy. Common themes emerged around familiarity, usage, content, and intercultural competency.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The major findings of the study were used to help understand the deconstructed elements in a theoretical context, to determine what echoed and what deviated from existing research. The discussion section followed the same thematic approach: first introducing the theme of networked narratives, moving on to the theme of supports and ending with the theme of the teacher exchange experience. These were sufficient to fully explore the research questions posed. The meaning of the findings was explored and related to the findings of similar studies and theories. Familiarity with the platform is highlighted in the first section. The motivations are discussed in terms of providing acculturation, professional and social support, followed by a typology of usage that blends social capital theory and diffusion of innovations theory.

Networked Narratives

While blogs and microblogs are designed to increase the scope of networks, the findings supported the use of technology platforms to strengthen informal and existing ties (Keel & Drew, 2004; Yeh, Okubo, Ma, Shea, Ou & Pituc, 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Frey & Roysircar, 2006). This was in opposition to the notion that technology creates instant communities (Castells, 2000). The assimilation into the host country's culture was hindered by the cushion of insular networks, but acted to reduce acculturative stress and to balance from any diminished job satisfaction while conforming to new norms, as referenced by Amy (Keel & Drew, 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Alternatively, the blog and microblog can be interpreted as serving as a social support to reduce acculturative stress. To understand better the way in which the exchange teachers' narratives are networked, familiarity and motivation with the technology must be considered.

Familiarity with the Technology Platforms

Results showed that overall familiarity with the blogging and microblogging platforms can be improved, especially in regards to taking advantage of features like tagging, hashtags, blogrolls. When compared to an experienced blogger like Miles McFarlane (Appendix A), users are not maximizing the tools. Once they have learned to post a blog, the motivation to seek other features that would increase the reach of their posting was lacking. This is tied to the fact that users perceived their blogs and tweets as a way to update friends and family while they were abroad, and as having little to do with widening their network or connecting with others who were on exchange.

An alternative explanation for this lack of use of additional features was the lack of time to explore the features. While on exchange, there were many stressful demands placed on the teacher, the least of which was mastering a new technology. They may have known about the features, but time constraints prohibited their application. It is in studying the blogs and Twitter feeds of exchange teachers that we can witness a very nascent shift from "locational communities to vocational communities" that is not yet being utilized (Putnam, 2001, p. 85).

Usage: Diffusion of Innovations Theory

In terms of the diffusion of innovations theory, the study revealed that the majority of the exchange teachers achieved a facility with social media technology for their personal use, but very little for their professional use. Barb (Interview) found that when she attempted to bring parents on board with a Twitter feed, the technology was not accepted and did not reach a critical mass needed for optimal usage (Grudin, 1988). In a similar vein, Amy (Interview) attended a workshop on the use of Twitter for professional development, but did not buy into it. The usage

quickly dwindled and was not sustained, due to lack of familiarity of the usage of hashtags, reflecting the theoretical construct of relative advantage. Two aspects of the theory are reaching critical mass and being seen as advantageous. In the finding, the use of the tool was not seen as advantageous relative to the time commitment and the effort required to familiarize oneself with the features of the platform. Without mastering the features, the tweets became unsearchable and therefore blocked any connections with people trying to communicate in the same discussion. This rendered the tool moot and unable to reach a necessary mass.

Another way to frame its slow workplace adoption is to consider qualities that form important characteristics of the innovation: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability. Rogers' (2003) theory of the diffusion of innovations served to explain the adoption of Twitter and blogging by exchange teachers. One could argue that its relatively slow adoption is consistent with Rogers' (2003) notion that critical mass has not yet been achieved to make it self-sustaining. We are still looking at the early adopters who are using a platform such as Twitter. Trialability, according to Rogers (2003) is the ability to access the innovation. Observability refers to viewing access by the general public. The non-twitterer may argue that there is little relative advantage to Twitter. Greg (Interview) stated that email was "working just fine at the moment," and blogging and Twitter offered no particular social prestige or added benefit. The construct of complexity has proved to be an issue to surmount if these tools are to be implemented successfully by exchange teachers.

These platforms also opened up a channel for feedback—the person looking, or "lurking", as was revealed in Rogers' (2003) example of innovation diffusion. Observability of both platforms is very good, and lurking is an acceptable and encouraged behaviour. Twitter is a relatively user-friendly microblogging tool that permits people to feel free to lurk, observing its

inner workings and uses until they are confident to try it out and to contribute. However, it may have focused unwanted attention to a person's actions.

This brought up a major barrier that was encountered across all the interviews. Educators were very aware of their position of authority and the importance of monitoring what messages were made public, to be read by students, parents or anyone in the education community. As a result, they were reluctant to make blanket statements about their new school, for fear of representing new curricula or systems in a negative light. They were sensitive to the public aspect of their position and did not want to endanger their position in their new assignment. Commenting on students is a delicate matter, and all shied away from directly revealing any sensitive information. The lack of privacy of these platforms took away from the ability for the exchange teacher to comment honestly. Fiona stated that this was not the platform to air any negative comments (Interview). One always had to be careful of what was posted and to tailor it carefully.

The theory of diffusion is extended to the area of privacy and damage control due to the unfiltered aspect of the platforms. Because blog and Twitter feed content is unfiltered, there also was the potential for damage to the reputation of the IEEP program, its partner organization and even international relations, if negative comments were posted. There was a much larger picture to be considered than just a tweet or a blog post. The reputations of the organizations they were representing abroad was at risk with any comments made. This ambassadorial effect extended the theoretical framework and placed the theory within a larger societal and political context.

If privacy was an important underlying workplace value, opening up one's self to broadcasting one's whereabouts and activities may not be shared by the organization as a whole.

It could be that privacy was a strong value in this group and acted as a barrier to full participation in social media platforms. There is too much at risk to use the platform for overly frank discussions. As such, blogging and microblogging risked engendering a fragmented, surface level of communication, merely depicting experiences rather than exploring their meanings. The deeper exercises of analysing were gone. Processes should be developed to ensure that meaningful in-depth reflections of teacher practices can be included, rather than being reduced to a mere travel blog or complaint in a Twitter discussion thread. With proper guidance, the layering of individual blogs and tweets can provide robust and deep understandings of educational and intercultural experiences.

Analysis of the data shows that the findings of this study neither reflect nor oppose the diffusion of innovations theory, in that the categories created for adopters of technology varied. It could not be determined if the teacher exchange bloggers and tweeters belonged to the early or late majority categorization of usage. This study did not look at whether the study participants held positions of opinion leadership in a system, a major determinant for classification. A new typology has been created to reflect the type of usage observed in this study that blends the diffusion of innovation theory and social capital theory.

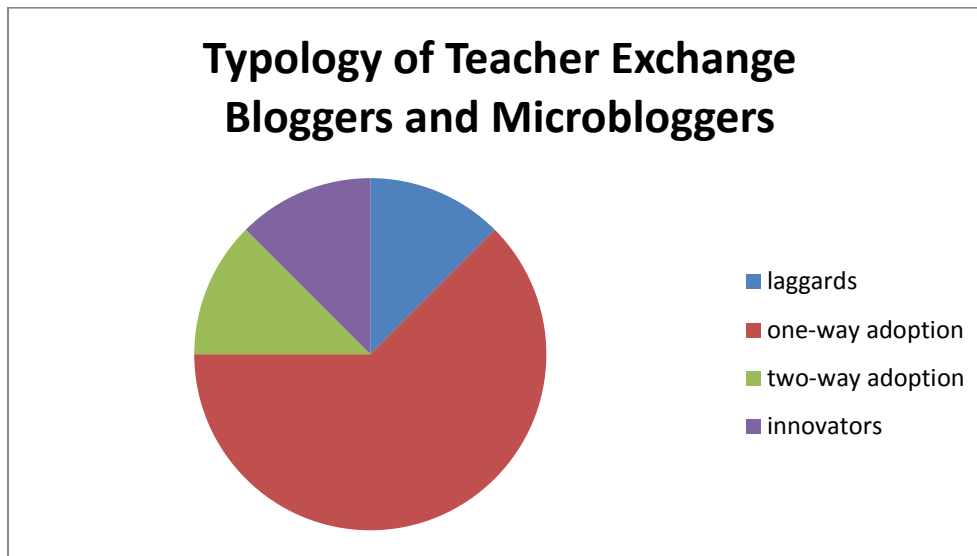**Typology of Teacher Exchange Bloggers and Microbloggers**

Figure 6: Typology of teacher exchange bloggers and microbloggers.

This figure shows a classification of the eight study participants in terms of their style of adoption of technology.

The first category in Figure 6 reflected Rogers' (2003) findings, the laggards. These were the people who were content not to explore new technologies, the change-aversion group. This accounted for 12.5% of the members interviewed. This group focused on traditional communications and included only family and friends in their circle of contacts.

The second category was classified as the one-way approach. This accounted for 62.5% of the study group: educators who utilized blogging or tweeting as a one-way communication tool. They were discreet in their platform choices and cautious. Safety and trust (Marwick, 2001) of the platform were major considerations for adoption. Many of them limited their contact to family and close friends.

The third category denotes the arrival of a two-way communication style. The platforms were used to create interactive conversation between the user and the audience, but did not include audience members communicating amongst themselves. They demonstrated less skepticism about new platforms and were willing to take some risks. This was 12.5 % of the population sample.

The fourth and last type was labelled as innovator, reflecting Rogers' (2003) typology. The exchange educators also welcomed into their circle of contact people from beyond their family and close friends. It accounted for the remaining 12.5% of study participants. Innovators, according to Rogers, have a high risk tolerance and they may adopt technologies that may fail. Here, they adopted an existing technology and used it in a novel way to encourage a conversational ecology. Audience members started conversations with each other. It is in this fourth categorization of social media users in which users shapte their digital habitats to suit their needs of connecting with others (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 20).

Motivation

The exchange teachers were drawn to social media to share their stories and their adventures abroad and to strengthen ties to their community that existed back in their home environments. Their cultural move resulted in a shift in communication practices to achieve satisfactory intercultural communication experiences. This process is detailed by Hall as the "identity-separation-growth dynamism," shown in Figure 3. Each challenge resulted in a learning curve, a temporary regression towards separation. Growth and adaptation occurred over time, bringing the exchange participants closer to the model of assimilation. The cycle repeated itself, building on the experiences and challenges that were progressively and successfully met.

The ideal goal for the practitioner working abroad was assimilation (Berry, 1997), but in some cases there was fluctuation between the stages of assimilation and separation. This appears to have been a common oscillation that occurred as they encountered stressful situations such as cultural shock. They were motivated to gravitate towards maintaining their cultural identity when acculturative stresses such as integrating into a new educational system presented themselves. The adoption of separatist tendencies helped them adjust to new requirements and gave them a brief reprieve from new demands, as detailed by Amy in her interview.

The stages of acculturation (Berry, 1997) served as a roadmap to understand why the exchange teachers would only want to use the blog or microblog as a tool to disseminate information and stay in touch with their home networks. The data supports that their narratives were not fully amplified—they were viewed as journals or memoirs. Simply put, the tool was there to support a sense of security and connectedness to what they had left behind.

Support

The support types spanned intercultural competency development, professional knowledge, social, and emotional support, and are discussed in this section.

Intercultural Competency Support

As the exchange teachers' journeys lengthened, their intercultural competencies increased and they achieved intercultural transformation. This was shown by the adaptation of participants' posts to deal with the cultural differences with humour and respect rather than with objection. This reflects the dynamics of stress, adaptation and growth posited by Kim and Ruben (1988, p. 316). The communication processes of the exchange teachers were adapted to result in greater intercultural understanding. More consciousness creates more diversity as postulated by Bruner

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(1996). The internal capacities of the individual have widened as a result of the identity-separation-growth dynamism shown in Figure 3.

The teachers, through their blogs and tweets, have gained a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences of different teaching environments, and have learned to contribute across different cultures of learning (Merryfield, 1992; Wenger et al., 2009).

Acculturation

The evidence in this study reinforced Berry's existing knowledge of acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997, p. 11). Over the period of a one-year exchange, teachers chose several strategies to cope with living in the new culture. The research participants approached the new culture by separating themselves from the Australian culture, and then generally settled on the strategy of integration. This process is demonstrated by the evidence of blog entries concentrating on the differences in the new educational system. Hannah (Interview) posted comparisons not similarities of the two systems, thus maintaining cultural identities. It respected diverse systems, allowing for separate identities in educational cultures. She used the blog as an appropriate venue to have Canadian friends understand some of the stresses she was facing as an exchange teacher. Later, colleagues from the new environment also followed her intercultural journey. She also enjoyed watching the interactions of the two cultures on the blog, showing an attempt to blend participation. As posited by Gresham & Clayton, the blog acted to spark cultural awareness and social integration (Gresham & Clayton, 2011).

Amy (Interview) also displayed evidence of separatism, with the purpose of blogging and tweeting being to give a break from the intercultural stresses and to reconnect with the home culture. She specifically tuned into Canadian outlets such as the Canadian Broadcasting

Corporation to find a sense of comfort in the stress of a new and unfamiliar setting of teaching

and living abroad. Other teachers used the blog to document differences in daily life abroad, and

to broadcast their journey to family, friends and colleagues back home. Most saw their audiences

as belonging to their home country and, in tailoring their posts, created content that focused on

what made their new life different from that at home—the excitement of being somewhere else,

doing different things, making trips to a grocery store with different foods and products, or

meeting new people.

The separatist leanings evidenced by the exchange teachers can be interpreted in this way

due to the temporary nature of their immersion. It was as though part of their exchange mission

was to determine differences, to gain from the diversity they found abroad. In deconstructing the

foreign education system, the exchange educators could decide what distinct features they might

be able to bring back to their home jurisdictions. They were participating in an exchange to

experience something different, to challenge their current pedagogies and practices.

The separatist qualities in how the exchange teachers engaged with social media also

demonstrated the use of social media as a buffer. Amy's tendency to tune into Canadian content

on Twitter (Interview) acts as a cushion against acculturative stress, to distract from diminished

job satisfaction in conforming to new norms (Keel & Drew, 2004; Yeh and Inose, 2003). The

microblog was a social support to reduce acculturative stress in this context.

The blogs provided social and psychological support through staying connected with

their home culture, and mirrored the findings from Keel and Drew (2004) that these supportive

networks can develop into a community. Hannah's blog demonstrated a conversational ecology,

and even included contributions from the host culture (Interview). The technologies of blogging

and tweeting provided reinforced communities (Donna, Interview), as well as guidance, advice and helped to share experiences and information (Hashim, p. 35, 2004).

Social Media Platforms Supporting Professional Knowledge

One would think that the blog and Twitter feeds would have served as the perfect platform on which to discuss teacher exchange best practices, but this was not the case. There was a strong reluctance to comment on school or teaching activities, with the study participants concluding that the platform was too open and exposed. It was not regarded as a safe space. Comments needed to be carefully tailored so as not to reveal personal details of any students or interactions with staff.

However, the social media platforms did offer substantial support, acting as a social and knowledge container for educators on exchange. What benefitted them personally in terms of social supports helped to support the professional development experience with tacit epistemic work through socialization and externalization (Nonaka, 1994, p. 20). With continued development, blogs and Twitter feeds stand to present an interwoven system of knowledge that can be accessed easily. Once they have gained deeper insights into the host culture, they can begin to gain greater insights into their own culture, blending methodologies and bringing new practices into their portfolio (Griffin, 1983). As effective global citizens, this becomes reflected in their teaching abroad and when they return to their home jurisdiction. Intercultural communication skills are developed and this encourages educators to teach from a global perspective, mirroring Gilliom and Wilson's notions of intercultural competencies (Gilliom, 1998; Wilson, 1982).

In addition, the argument made by Guskey (2002, p. 381) is strengthened by the very nature of a teacher exchange. A teacher exchange is by definition experiential, a very hands-on approach to embracing and reflecting on the challenge of teaching overseas (Tarc, 2007). This is a case of the gap between intention and action closing (Shirky, 2008). Not only is the evidence and learning acquired very powerful, so too is observing a different peer group handle curriculum and teaching practices from another perspective. This can be obtained by lurking on others' blogs or following Twitter feeds, without necessarily replying or becoming directly involved. The resulting ambient awareness can contribute to learning (Ryan et al., 2008). Should there be comments or retweets, this would add to the concept of a conversational ecology put forth by boyd, Golder and Lotan (2010). It is, in essence, peers training peers by modeling their pedagogical skills. The end result is a more reflective practitioner who becomes part of a wider international community.

Knowledge Management System

The teacher exchange blogging and microblogging reinforced what has been theorized in the study of KMS (Skok & Kalmanovitch, 2004; Edwards et al., 2005), but also opposed and extended certain areas. Blogging and microblogging as an accepted technology, a repository, and its ability to follow cultural norms were discussed.

This appeared to be one of the major stumbling blocks to the ability of the blog and microblog acting as a KMS in the context of teacher exchanges. Blogging was a relatively unaccepted technology in this community. When surveying IEEP's 2013 cohort of exchange teachers, only five of the 15 exchange teachers had previously blogged. Only two of the 15 2013 cohort of exchange teachers used Twitter, and it was for personal use. On the other hand, it can

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be argued that there is good ambient awareness of the technologies in general, as all the participants were familiar with them.

The issue may well have resided in their construction of the concept of a blog or a Twitter feed as a one-way communication tool as opposed to a tool of networking and two-way interactions. The degree to which the user leverages the two-way conversation capability of the platforms can ultimately determine the platform's success. Blogs that do not facilitate engagement and conversation tended to lose their audience (Barnes and Lescault, 2012).

The lack of comments on the teacher exchange blogs demonstrated this point. Educators on exchange needed to realize and to be shown the potential of these platforms to connect with each other and to use it to expand and externalize their professional learning networks. If possible, this should be done by someone sharing the same mutual sub-cultural language, a past exchange teacher that actively used these platforms to network presenting at a predeparture session, in order to demonstrate the benefits of dedicating the time and effort required to optimize the benefits of the technologies.

In comparison to a wiki or an intranet—which would have even greater autopoietic, cognitive and connectionistic functionality—blogging and microblogging were relatively widely known tool amongst educators. It was important to have selected a tool for which your target audience is ready, as well as having provided training and support to maximize its KM potential.

Repository

With the creation of networked narratives, it was very useful for the collection of exchange teachers to capture this knowledge (Liebowitz et al., 2000, p.3), as the tacit knowledge gained from the dialogue in the blog and microblog (Nonaka, 1994) could prove invaluable to

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future participants. There are decades of un-networked wisdom from the past 34 years during which this government program for exchanges has been in existence. With a rough average of 20 participants sent on exchange each year, there are over 600 years of untapped tacit and explicit teacher exchange knowledge and skills to be shared in a user-generated permanent repository in the province of Alberta alone. Rather than the international teacher exchange becoming a very individualized experience from which this knowledge risks being lost with the individual, knowledge is now retained within these connected blogs and tweets, permanently recorded in a centralized searchable repository. This demonstrated the cognitivisitic aspect of these platforms in relation to knowledge management systems. It also creates a space where new knowledge can be created (Cook & Brown, 1999).

Cultural Norms

Blogging can be a daunting task for those not familiar with the technology, and it can take time for a technology to be adopted and reach a critical mass. Without total participation, the KMS of blogging risks sub-optimal usage for KM and can become exclusive. This also related to Grudin's (1988, p. 9) proposition that KM technologies only benefit the same subset of users—upper management—and tax the load of other organizational layers, such as the teacher's personal workload. Paroutis (2009, p. 6) found that one of the most commonly stated barriers to using a technology was if no one else used or contributed to them. Therefore, knowing that others are using it and are being recognized for using it is a factor that could positively affect their participation.

Social and Emotional Support

The blogs and microblogs provided social support amongst a known audience more so than professional support. The network ties were localized, dense and redundant, and for the

most part did not represent bridging ties (Kadushin, 2012). They reinforced "exclusive identities and homogenous groups" (Putnam, 2001, p. 22). In one case, outside contact was even seen as an unwanted intrusion, resulting in the principal of the school requesting the post be taken down (Chad, Interview).

The malicious comment, although not directed at the exchange teacher, brought to light norms of privacy and trust. This reflected the theoretical constructs presented by Keel & Drew (2004), Frey & Roysircar (2006), and Yeh et al., (2008) regarding social support systems buffering stresses of an international experience. Satisfaction with the social supports can reduce stress and, as Donna (Interview) stated, it supported the overall exchange experience and provided bonding capital (Putnam, 2001). As Putnam posited, the inclusive distributed networks were useful in creating solidarity. This connectionist function (Skok and Kalmanovitch, 2004) from within their social group was also advantageous. This mirrored Zhao's (2006)'s and Hashim's (2004) constructs of informal networks and the benefits these networks brought to the teacher exchange experience.

Privacy Support and Control

The exchange teacher's need for privacy reflected the oscillations in the stress-adaptation-growth cycle (Kim & Ruben, 1988) when choosing an appropriate platform. For this reason, Hannah selected a highly secure Facebook site, and Greg was content to keep his technology use limited to emails and Skype. Control was exerted in terms of who was allowed to enter their networks. The other participants forayed into blog use, with the majority taken aback when the open platform resulted in contact from individuals outside of their intended audience.

The Teacher Experience and Social Media

Appropriate Choice of Platform Tools

Measuring the success of social media in organizations was of particular relevance to the teacher exchange field, as it gave quantifiable evidence as to what platforms were considered useful and trusted. It is interesting that according to Figure 7, LinkedIn is rated very highly by users, and this platform is worthy of further consideration as a tool for exchange teachers. In this platform, users have to be accepted as a contact, and secure conversations can develop. In addition, the platform carries with it a professional connotation of linking professionals. The figure also pointed to emerging trends and social media platforms that are on the rise. This will help determine future avenues for technology-mediated conversation platforms.
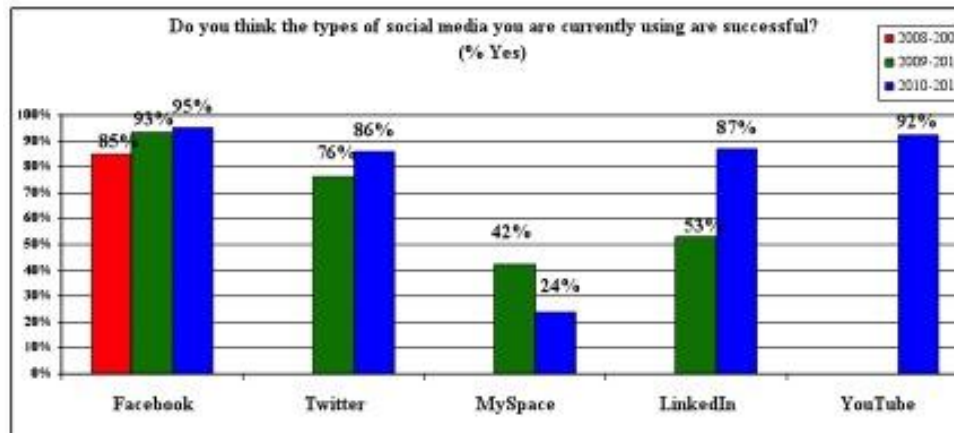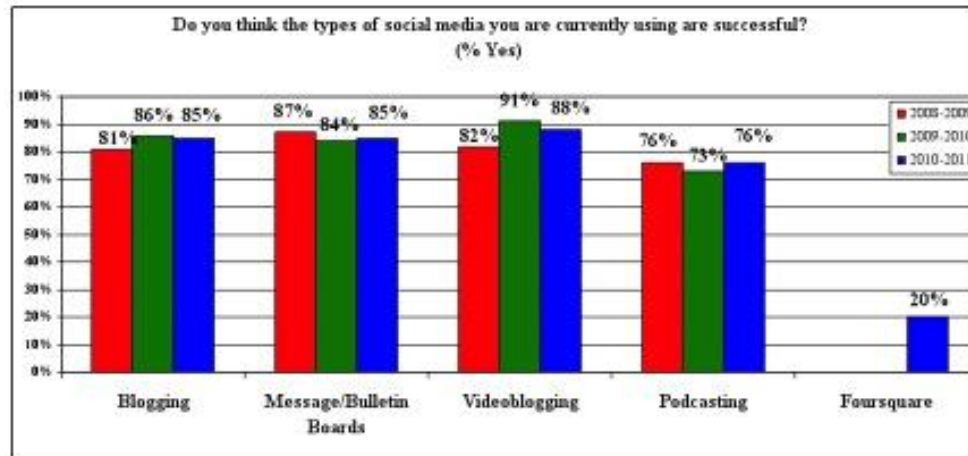
Figure 7: Perceived success of various social media platforms.

Barnes & Lescault (2012). This figure shows across the education sector how successful the various types of social media such as Twitter and LinkedIn have been. Respondents indicated an increase of trust in the use of all five platforms listed, with the exception of MySpace. The largest increase of perceived success is with the YouTube platform, followed by LinkedIn.

Chapter Summary

In many ways, the research findings reflected similarities between my results and the existing work of other researchers. The findings still extended knowledge of the area by reinforcing current thinking. They were important to link technology to the interconnected and networked world of the 21st century, and placed the teacher exchange experience within a modern context mediated by technology. International experiences do not happen in isolation. In this chapter, the typology broadens theory by blending two existing theories. The typology deviated from the diffusion of innovations theory to blend social capital theory, and nuanced the way in which exchange teachers engaged with social media in either a one way or two way capacity. The research increased the knowledge of the teacher exchange field and underscored the potential for cohort members to assist and support each other.

The study revealed several salient points. The networks formed relied heavily on bonded network ties that were constructed upon the values of mutual trust, privacy and control. In all cases, blogs provided support—whether social, informational, or professional. Emerging repository and advice-seeking aspects showed that these platforms were slowly beginning to demonstrate themselves as knowledge management systems, although it was most definitely in the early days of connecting vocational communities. As usage increases, and trusted bonding and bridging networks expand, so does the potential for these platforms to support the exchange experience. There may be an increase in the number of weak ties to link members of physically disparate groups and thereby aid in the diffusion of ideas and resources (Granovetter, 1973) and information (Wenger et al., 2009). As social media practices in the education field evolve, so too should the intercultural and professional development practices of international exchange teachers.

However, this was a distinct group of participants comprising eight of 35 teacher-exchange participants in one province, in one country. The findings were thus very contextual and a particular snapshot. The data represented only this small group of participants. As such, the findings may be transferable to similar educators on exchange worldwide but may not be generalizable to other education or sojourning populations.

Chapter 6: Suggestions and Reflections

Over the course of this study, several ideas emerged as to how teacher exchange participants might best leverage technology to enhance the process of immersion into another education system and culture during the exchange period. These suggestions included: exploration of the teacher exchange participants' rate of adoption of social media tools and technology and how to optimize that adoption; use of mentors to increase usage of social media platform features during the exchange; and implementation of formal structures and optimization guidelines. Acting on these suggestions also may lead to recruitment of additional participants as well as increasing the sense of connectedness amongst the teacher exchange community.

Rate of social media adoption

How can Rogers' (2003) theory be applied to accelerate the rate of adoption of Twitter in the workplace? As with Rogers' (2003) example of the Peruvian homemakers and the adoption of boiling water into their daily activities, the adoption of Twitter must first happen with the right group of people—approaching the late majority or the laggards would not be as effective. The "village opinion leaders" must be sought out, as they are the ones most able to sway ways of thinking and doing, activating their networks to spread and reach a critical mass and become self- sustaining (Rogers, 2003, p. 98). To apply Rogers' (2003) theory, it will be necessary to put ourselves in the shoes of the organizational worker to reach and persuade them from a client rather than an innovation perspective. Taking on a 'what can this do for you' approach is made

even more culturally effective when shared by someone with a "mutual subcultural language" (Rogers, 2003, p. 112).

Peers Training Peers

Educator exchange blogging and tweeter mentors could be established, and they could become part of the orientation process of the IEEP program. If time is made for the new cohorts of exchange teachers to explore new technologies, the "village opinion" could persuade people of the meaningful contribution of those technologies to their exchange experience. Employing peer model usage will concretely show pertinent advantages of using social media, and provide proven pathways so that new users will benefit from accumulated knowledge and wisdom of previous participants. Pitfalls of the different types of technology can also be shared so that the new exchange teacher can make informed decisions on platform choices. This will help digitization to become even more transformative.

Increased Usage of Features

Mentors may well be able to encourage exploration of the technology to optimize the usage of features such as social tagging, search engine optimization, and information retrieval. This will be transmitted in a user friendly way, and the benefits will be shown in a real world way. The more users knows about the system and are involved in creating the system (Kujala, 2003, p. 11), the more bloggers will use it to its full potential. Sites such as shown in Appendix G let bloggers optimize their sites and put into place useful information architecture.

Social Tagging

Blogging is folksonomic in nature, therefore building a function that automatically tags words (metadata) to create searchable content would be of benefit to the teacher exchange

community to find other exchange teachers. Creating a cloud tag widget would further enhance the reader's ability to scan blog content quickly for relevant information. The Dublin Core Metadata Initiative website (Appendix E) (Garshol, 2004) serves as a template to make finding information easier, although getting bloggers to input metadata beyond item six may prove to be challenging. This surrogate record keeping system will be most effective with wide user uptake.

Search Engine Optimization

Another suggestion for improvement is to implement searching capability to find similar bloggers with similar content, perhaps an algorithm to compare cloud tags and suggest linking with other particular users. Twitter has a feature where it suggests followers with a similar profile, such a feature on blogging platforms would be useful. The application of a program such as SEO blogger (SEO, 2012) enables users to determine which words maximize search engine optimization by helping the writer select the most searched words.

Information Retrieval

To improve this platform as a KM system, additional systematic ways to organize and retrieve information could be created (Bowman, 2002, p. 24). If bloggers can categorize their blog and have their titles contain controlled vocabulary, this would support information retrieval. I would also suggest that once they have categorized their blog, that pop-ups be generated to suggest controlled vocabulary to encourage a high quality of knowledge and online tutorials for creating surrogate records (Appendix F). An encouraging message such as this will help find others similar to them may aid in uptake.

The KMS analysis of blogging broadens and deepens our understanding on the outside forces pushing and pulling on technology platforms, and offers a glimpse into how we as a

society shape our technology just as much as it shapes us. There needs to be deliberate and systematic action in using KM technologies appropriate to the target audience that blends with organizational and teaching norms. With proper implementation and guidelines for usage, the ecosystem of blogging interactions stands to optimize educational knowledge flow that will benefit this globalized community of practice.

Shared Platform

Encouraging exchange teachers to use the Edublogger's platform may encourage the development of weak and bridging ties. Edublogger.org is a community of over 1.7 million educators, students and schools engaged in blogging, and would permit exchange teachers on a global scale to connect. It also provides valuable support, video tutorials and prize incentives (Appendix G). It stands to scale the reach of teacher exchange narratives and theorizations to be conducive to the creation of a participatory culture and a virtual community of practice. Finding a teacher exchange mentor who has used the Edublogger platform would be very useful for its dissemination and promotion.

Mentors may also take an active role in increasing the reach of current teachers on exchange by commenting on their blog, or retweeting. Guest blogging is another avenue to increase readership and increase the sense of connectedness. Exchange teachers may wish to establish a main blog site where generic information can be accessed, such as question and answer pages, and a compilation of best practices. This may be best accomplished at debrief meetings following the exchange period that are conducted by the IEEP office.

But a caution is inserted here, as studies have highlighted that mentorship alone is not sufficient to fully support a teacher into a professional school community (ATA, 2011). "In fact,

many [participants] reported that, when their mentors proved ineffective, they turned to informal sources of support" (ATA, 2011, p. 25). The exchange teacher associations supply this service on a voluntary basis, for the purpose of sharing their experiences and a desire to help other exchange teachers maximize their opportunities.

The Formalized Structures

For this reason, implementing some formalized program structures (Figure 8) around social media usage would be useful. There is hesitation to impose a heavily regulated blogging or tweeting policy, as the nature of these platforms is one of open source and bottom up user-generated content. Validated content through hierarchies may stunt the growth of user adoption rates, making them feel monitored. As with a platform like Wikipedia, members self-regulate, and if there is sustained engagement with the platform, democratic decisions will be made to safeguard appropriateness of the posts and tweets. A hybridization of formalized validated structures and ephemeral information may present the best path.
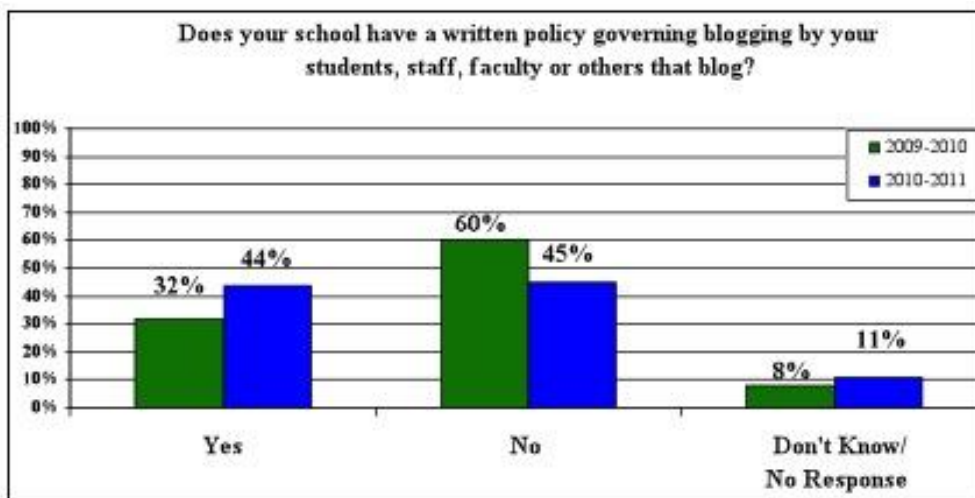
Figure 8: Policies around social media.

This figure shows the percentages of schools that have a written policy in regards to blogging. Barnes & Lescault, 2012.

It is important to keep in mind that the Alberta international educator exchange program does not operate in isolation, and inviting partner organizations to participate in these initiatives may be useful in generating social media uptake across the global community of exchange teachers. If some of the efforts can be globally synchronized, there is a better chance of success and a richer diversity of discussion can be achieved. With more input, novel approaches to challenges can be tackled.

Recruitment Tool

There is potential for the blog and the Twitter feed to act as a recruitment tool for teacher exchange participants. IEEP information sessions are held in various school jurisdictions throughout the year, and during these presentations a list of current blogs and twitter handles from exchange teachers is provided to them. This demonstrates experientially how these fellow teachers are navigating the challenges and rewards of a teacher exchange. A blog or links provided in tweets provide specific information and details that are more easily digestible than an explicit procedure manual—it seamlessly blends the explicit and tacit in a meaningful and interesting manner.

Emerging Questions and Future Research

Although many concrete suggestions have been suggested to leverage social media usage within the teacher exchange community, there are questions that remain.

Can the teacher exchange community be convinced that following the Edublog platform in synchronicity will benefit all? Or, does it go against our ability to shape the digital tools to our needs, as Wenger et al (2009) states is so very important. The platform is easily learned and adaptable, and Edublog has set up mentors to lend support and collaboration and, in addition, assist in sharing of best practices in various community meeting spots within the site. Will conformity lend itself to or take away from the creative learning that takes place while on exchange?

Future research should look to implement KMS design features into the blogging and microblogging platforms and to make development decisions that are consistent with the teacher exchange values of privacy and trust, preferred styles of communication, all of which are shaped by particular cultural contexts.

With the evolution of blogs and tweets as information repositories, what is required on an organizational and policy level to support the development of this online community of exchange teachers? This warrants further research, and bringing policy makers to the table to see how best to support this community of practice as it moves into the virtual realm.

Within a larger political context, how can social media use leverage the teacher exchange program as an effective international education initiative? Will the impacts be felt by a very small sector of the education workforce spread to the general teaching population with continued appropriate social media uptake? How does the teacher exchange fit into the universal process of social change?

Closing Reflections

The major limitation of this study is that the sampling procedures were non-random. Future studies could incorporate a more random sampling that provides a larger cross section of exchange teachers worldwide in order for the findings to be generalizable rather than transferable.

This investigation into social media usage for exchange teachers has resulted in important discussions on micro and macro levels. At the local level, changes can be implemented to maximize the scalability and connectivity of social media tools. On a larger global level, policy can be fine-tuned and developed to leverage international exchange programs thus contributing to global citizenship and increased international market shares.

In our connected world, the choice of technology platform is varied. This study would be short sighted to assume that blogging or tweeting is the only way to approach connecting this community virtually. Wikis, a walled garden approach such as a controlled intranet, and platforms like LinkedIn with growing memberships all deserve serious consideration, and ultimately it is the choice of the users as to what platform best suits their needs in balancing privacy with reach. Helping them make informed decisions about platform capabilities is key to connectivity within this community and may help reduce acculturative stress. Further research is warranted in new technologies as well as creating a hybridizing a folksonomic user generated conversational ecology.

Creating a space for reflection on the teacher exchange experience will encourage autopoieity and reciprocity from within their social milieu and will tap into the corpus of knowledge across the global community of international exchange teachers. Intercultural

competencies can be developed and enhancing a deeper understanding of how exchange teachers can contribute to global citizenship. The study has demonstrated how exchange teachers shift their communication practices in a blogging context to meet to attain satisfactory intercultural communication experiences through the process of Hall's identity-separation-growth dynamism (1976). The social media platforms have acted as social supports to reduce acculturative stress. The integration of appropriate social media technologies can enhance the way exchange teachers imagine their social and professional existence, and promote shared narratives and social constructions of the value of international education initiatives. It serves as an important avenue to respond to the help seeking behaviours of exchange teachers. The speed and scope of change around technology means that the study of teacher exchanges is ever evolving as well, affected by ethical issues of privacy, control, and trust.

It is hoped that this study will direct greater attention to the intersection of social media, international education and intercultural competency. As teachers continue to embrace the challenge of teacher exchanges abroad, engaging with the world is fundamental to ongoing prosperity in education and also on a global economic level. Focusing on international education opportunities such as teacher exchange will hopefully contribute to the successful advancement of our educational workforce in an evolving world. When properly supported and networked, exchanges represent a valuable informal professional learning opportunity that permits a creative approach to teacher development that warrants further research and policy refinement.

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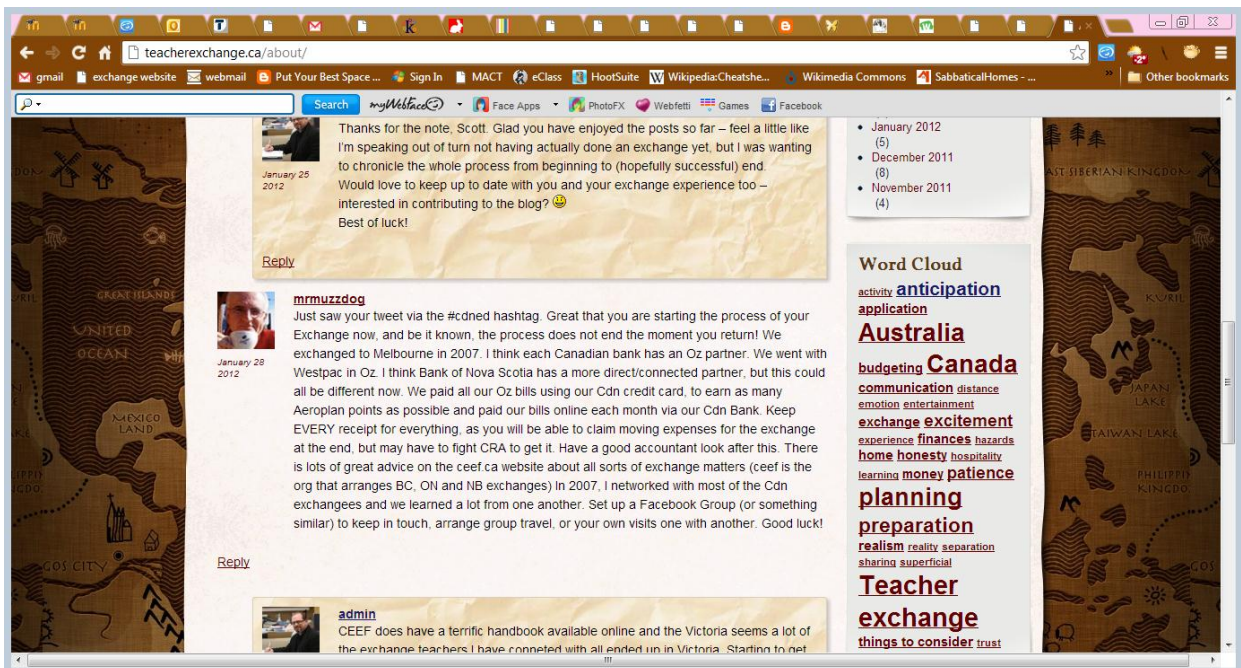
Appendix A

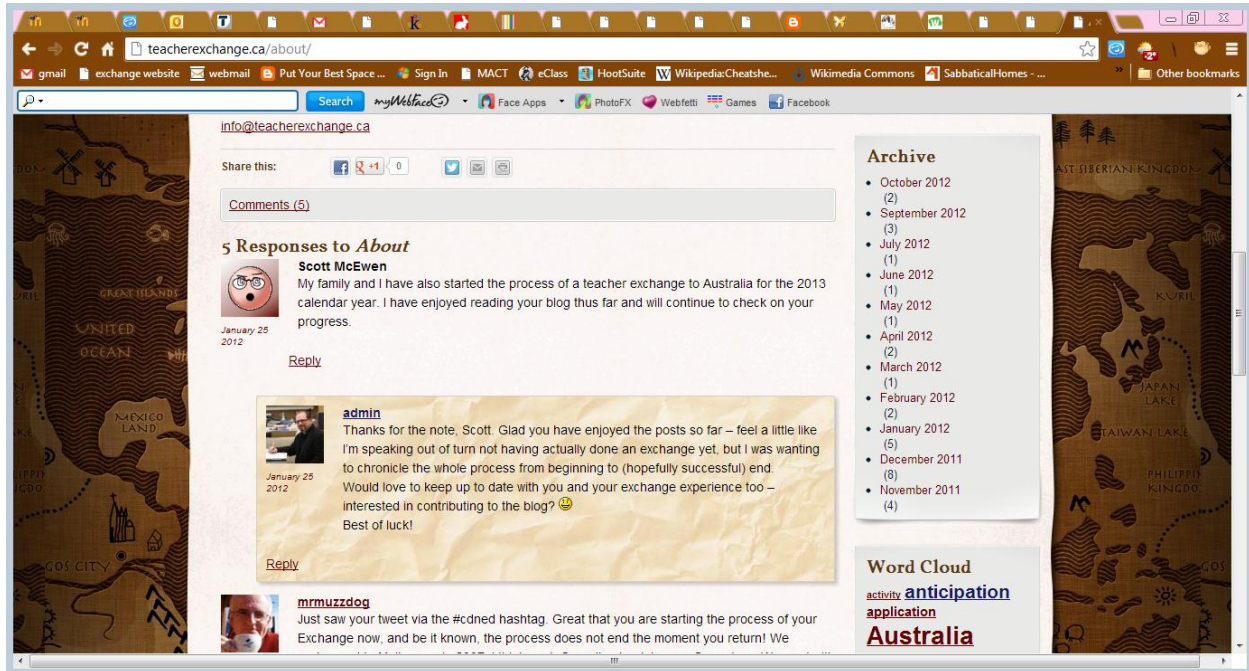Blog of Teacher Exchange Applicant Miles McFarlane (Retrieved March 2013).

This blog post shows social tagging, and the author has tagged the post below with the word anticipation.
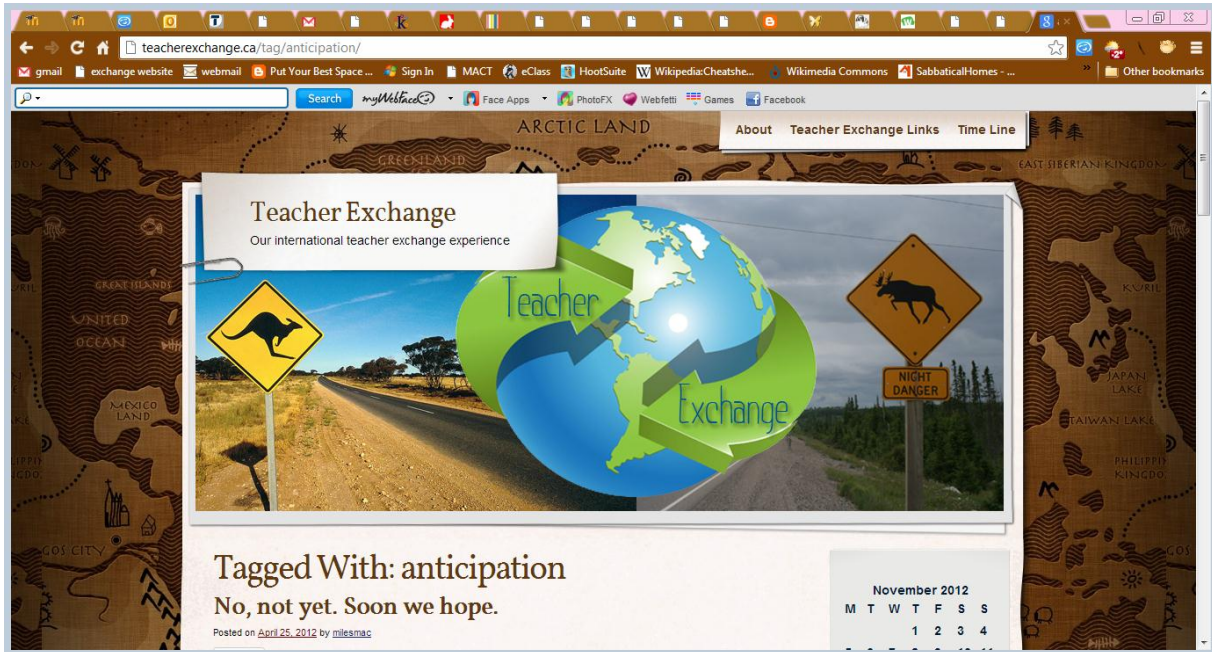
The blog post below demonstrates word cloud functionality.

Archive functionality is highlighted on this blog's left hand side.

Broadcasting ability of blogs- ability to embed tweet-able posts

Appendix B

Listing of Teacher Exchange Blogs

Below is a screen shot taken of the IEEP website. The IEEP program attempts to collect blog URLs to share with future and current exchange teachers.
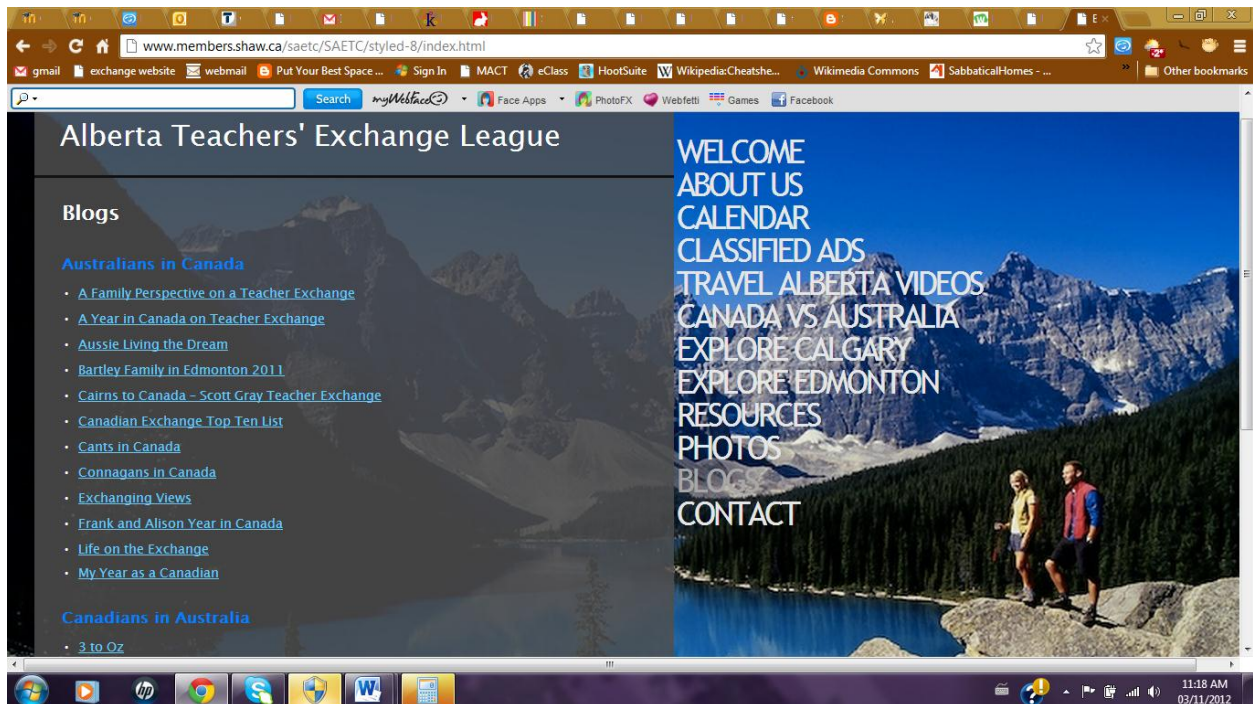
Appendix C

Interview Guide and Script

Welcome- thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Your contributions will add to the body of knowledge around teacher exchanges and how best to leverage technology to support the teacher exchange experience. This qualitative study involves the interviewing of 8-10 past Alberta teacher exchange participants from 2010-2012. The study should be published in 2014 and may be used in future conferences.

If at any time you wish to withdraw your consent, please inform me. I have chosen to do a face to face interview to take advantage of the semi-structured interview format. This will allow you to elaborate at length on areas you would like to comment further on, or for us to explore particular topics further.

This interview will be recorded and transcribed, and you will be assigned a participant pseudonym.

The interview should last approximately one hour in length.

International Educator Exchange Participant

- Please describe your teacher exchange experience- where you went, what time period, what your Alberta teaching assignment was at the time of exchange, and what it was in your host overseas school.
- Describe your teacher exchange experience in terms of its effectiveness in professional development

Social Media

- Please describe your familiarity with social media- what social media tools do you currently use?
- How often do you use these media? Once a day, several times a day, several times a week/month
- For what purpose do you use these media?

Blogging

- Did you blog or microblog prior to your teacher exchange? What sort of content, and why?
- Microblog definition- weblog, tweeting, Facebook

- Did you microblog while on exchange?
- If so, did you find this useful, and why?
- What was the content of your blogs/microblogs?
- Did you blog/microblog about your professional practise?
- Did you read any other exchange teachers micro/blogs/tweets prior to or while on exchange? Was this useful?
- If you blogged/microblogged, how was it beneficial to support or detract from your teacher exchange experience?
- Did you have any surprising moments while using social media on exchange
- Do you have some specific examples of a positive e social media experience while on exchange
- Do you have a negative experience with social media?
- What was the effect of this experience on your teacher exchange?
- Did you receive unwanted comments on your blog/microblog? Describe.
- Did you comment on other teacher's blogs/microblogs? What and why?
- Describe your teacher exchange experience in terms of micro/blogging contributing to reflective teaching and professional development
- Did tweeting/blogging have an effect on the way you collaborated with students, teachers, both from home and away?
- How did writing a blog/tweeting contribute or take away from a sense of community? (teacher exchange)
- Did tweeting/blogging help/hinder your intercultural experience?
- Do you still continue to use social media in regards to your teaching practise?

Appendix C

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Networked Narratives and the Practitioner Living Abroad as a Support

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Background
You are being asked to participate in a study about international experiences and the use of technology. Professional development is an important aspect of practice across many disciplines. Living abroad and experiencing life in another culture with your career can be a life-changing experience. Educator exchanges are a unique professional development opportunity for teachers and school administrators to collaborate within their profession. In offering the opportunity to experience one's vocation in a different location, it opens the door to new perspectives and ways of knowing. As we become more globally minded, teacher exchanges can serve as an important bridge for creating these international networks of teachers.
C
As a past participant an international education exchange, your participation in this study is requested. The results of this study will be used in support of the graduate level capping project that I am undertaking in the Masters of Arts in Communication and Technology at the University of Alberta, and may be shared at future research conferences or for future research journal articles.

Purpose
The purpose of this research study is to investigate how practitioners use technology while participating in an overseas exchange.

Study Procedures
Interviewees that have been approached are Alberta exchange teachers on an international exchange in 2010, 2011, or 2012. Research procedures include a face to face interview, to be audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview session will last approximately one hour. The overall length of the study will be eight months, with the scheduling of individual interviews to take place during the time frame of January to March 2013. Interviews will be conducted at the Alberta Teachers' Association at 11010 142 Street, Edmonton, unless otherwise stated due to travel restrictions. Your time commitment to this study will comprise your travel time, a short briefing prior to the interview, the hour-long interview, and your return travel time. It will contribute to the understanding of how social media impacts professional practice as well as personal growth.

Benefits and Risks
Benefits that may arise from your participation in the study would be the opportunity to further reflect on the impact that your teacher exchange experience has had on you, and the role technology has played in your experience. We hope that the information we get from this study will help you and other members of the teaching profession better understand the effects of teacher exchange. The benefits are related to professional knowledge

and practice. I don't anticipate any risks as a result of your participation. As a participant, you will have the right to withdraw at any point and without question.

Voluntary Participation
You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to answer any specific questions even if participating in the study. You may opt out without penalty and can ask to have any collected data withdrawn from the database and not included in the study up to one month after the interview. Participants can opt out of the study by contacting investigator Carolyn Freed at Carolyn.freed@ualberta.ca both during the interview and up to one month following the interview.

Confidentiality & Anonymity
Intended uses of the research are primarily for the graduate capping project. It will be shared with the academic and professional community through academic journals and conference presentations. Participants will not be personally identified in any of these. Data will be kept confidential, with only the principal investigator and supervising professor having access to the data. Anonymity can be guaranteed in that they will be assigned an identifier at the transcription phase. Data will be kept in a secure office for a minimum of 5 years following completion of the research project and all electronic data will be password-protected. Participants will be given a copy of the transcripts to check for accuracy.

Further Information
If you consent to participate in this study, a copy of the signed consent form will be given to you as the participant to take home for your records.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615. This office has no affiliation with the study investigators.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Carolyn Freed
Principal Investigator
780-392-6901
Carolyn.freed@ualberta.ca

Dr. Lynette Shultz
Supervisor
780-492-4441
Lynette.shultz@ualberta.ca

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Freed
MACT graduate student

<p style="text-align:center">PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM</p>

Title of Study: The Practitioner Living Abroad and Networked Narratives as a Support in the Acculturative Process

Principal Investigator: *Carolyn Freed, phone 780-392-6901*

Research/Study Coordinator: Dr. Lynette Shultz, phone 780-492-4441

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study? You are being asked to be in this study because you have participated in an international teacher exchange.

There is an information sheet attached here for more details on the study. You are encouraged to ask questions if you feel anything needs to be made clearer. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

What is the reason for doing the study?

The purpose of this study is to look at how the use of social media supports the teacher exchange experience. We hope to answer how social media can act as a support during a teacher exchange overseas, and how blogging can affect the teacher exchange experience.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to take part in an interview that will last for approximately one hour, either in person or by telephone.

What are the risks and discomforts?

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

What are the benefits to me?

This study may help other teacher exchange participants in the future maximize their exchange experiences by successfully implementing blogging into their exchange experience. You may also be providing benefits to society in terms of advancement of knowledge and what it means to be a global citizen and add to the body of knowledge in the field of communications and international education.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Being in this study is your choice and completely voluntary. If you decide to be in the study, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any time.

Will my information be kept private?

During the study we will be recording and transcribing your interview. We will do everything we can to make sure that this data is kept private. No data relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the study supervisors' office or published by the researchers. After the study is done, we will still need to securely store your data that was collected as part of the study. At the University of Alberta, we keep data stored for 5 years after the end of the study, and this will be securely stored in the researcher's supervisor's office.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact;

Carolyn Freed, Investigator- 780-392-6901
Lynette Shultz, Study Supervisor- 780-492-4441
If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Health Research Ethics Board at 780-492-2615. This office has no affiliation with the study investigators.

CONSENT

Title of Study: The Practitioner Living Abroad and Networked Narratives as a Support in the Acculturative Process

Principal Investigator(s): Carolyn Freed   **Phone Number(s):780-392-6901**
Study Coordinator: Lynette Shultz   **Phone Number(s):780-492-4441**

	Yes	No
Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	☐	☐
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	☐	☐
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	☐	☐
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	☐	☐
Do you understand that you are free to leave the study at any time, without having to give a reason?	☐	☐
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?	☐	☐

I agree to take part in this study:

Signature of Research Participant _____

    (Printed Name) _____

Date:_____

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.
Signature of Investigator or Designee _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Dublin Core Metadata Initiative

| Global navigation options: | **Home** | **Metadata Basics** | **DCMI Specifications** | **Community and Events** | **Join/Support** | **About Us** |

Search: [Enter keyword] [Search]

Dublin Core Metadata Element Set, Version 1.1

Introduction

The Dublin Core Metadata Element Set is a vocabulary of fifteen properties for use in resource description. The name "Dublin" is due to its origin at a 1995 invitational workshop in Dublin, Ohio; "core" because its elements are broad and generic, usable for describing a wide range of resources.

Appendix E

Sample Pop-Up to Encourage Metadata Collection

Hey! We`ve noticed you blog a lot about education. Want to increase traffic to your blog? Why not start tagging your entries with these kinds of keywords to let others notice and follow you more easily!

Suggested tag words:

- education
- exchange
- teaching
- learning
- curriculum
- international education
- teacher exchange
- educator
- working overseas
- educators overseas

Appendix F

Sample tips for optimization

Retrieved from: http://basicblogtips.com/optimize-for-better-rankings.html

12 On-page Optimization Tips for Improved Rankings

1) Include Your Keyword In The Post Title

Your headlines capture both your audience and Google's attention. These are the first thing that people would see on SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages), grabbing their attention long enough for them to decide whether they want to click on it or not. So apart from just putting in the keyword, a great fool-proof strategy here is to keep the text in the tag short, yet descriptive and eye-catching. Research has shown that 60-70 characters is optimal for a headline. Here's an example of what you might get when you type "dog training" into Google — notice the

keywords in bold?

2. Include Keyword Into Headings and Sub-headings for better rankings

The next most obvious place to include keywords would be the other headings. These are the next most heavily weighted ranking factor. Aside from segmenting a page into easily digestible portions, it also makes everything crawler-friendly (crawlers, aka spiders, bots or indexers –

3

miniature computer programs that "crawl" the World Wide Web for data to supply to search engines). These headings also make it easier for them to index and gather data for search engines.

3. Bold, Italicize and Underline Keywords

In the past, SEO experts placed great emphasis and thought these were major ranking factors for SEO. Since Google updated their Search algorithms (Google Panda and Penguin), whether these are still significant is somewhat debatable, so to be safe side, these should be done sparingly. The general guideline would be to use these for the purpose of enhancing the overall visual impact of a web page, as well as your visitor's reading experience.

4. Include Keyword in first and last sentence

These also do not affect rankings directly, but since web crawlers lift crucial data from the title and the first sentence, it is a strategic move to not only include keywords but to make these sentences as descriptive and informative as possible. But remember, your content must first cater to human readers, not to crawlers or robots, so it's still top priority to have content that's fun and easy to read. You might notice that when your post is shared on Facebook and Twitter this information is pulled and used as part of the text for the shared content. Social signals play a vital role in your blog's SEO.

5. Include Keyword in Image ALT. text

No one can argue that visual content express a lot more than words can, but since Google crawlers can only lift textual data, images are quite redundant. This is where we use ALT text and attributes for images. ALT just means "alternative" so it's the default text displayed instead of a blank icon when a user disables images on the browser that he or she is using. Google has long confirmed that they do pick out data from alt captions to determine an image's properties, so you have to make sure that important keywords as well as relevant information are inserted into an image ALT text and attributes.

6. Do Not Overpopulate Post With Keywords

Over optimization and keyword stuffing are the reasons why Google updated their systems to penalize websites. Keep your keyword density percentage between 2% to 4% of your page's overall content, because anything above that range becomes annoying to readers and could get your site penalized by Google.

7. Use Words That Relate To Keywords

Google uses Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI), which basically involves extracting the essence of a text by identifying and contextualizing the common keywords and phrases that appear in it. For example, a web crawler would expect to find words and phrases like "smartphone," "Android Jelly Bean," "Super AMOLED" and even "iPhone 4s" for an article that has "Samsung Galaxy S3″ as a main keyphrase. This just means posts should have a smooth and natural flow and contain relevant and meaningful content, not something achievable by repeating keywords and using article spinners.

8. Use Synonymous Keywords

This practice is associated with the LSI since web crawlers will be looking for synonyms and closely related phrases that are commonly found in your article, so it is good practice to mix in a variety in the wording of keywords so that the crawlers would have lots of indexing options. For example, the keyword "e-book" could be reworded as "online guide" or "Internet manual."

9. Links with keyword as anchor text

Linking to other pages on your site or to different parts of your web page is a great way to improve your site's bounce rate and increase overall website traffic. Well-written links improve site-navigation and user experience. Visitors save time and are able to easily find what they're looking for all on one page. A great example of a website that does this well is Wikipedia.

10. Optimize the words in your Meta Description

This is the next thing you see underneath a website's title on the search engine result pages. Though it is not a major ranking factor, this greatly influences user behaviour as it is essentially the short preview of the website that they are about to enter. This brief summary proves to be quite important so the best way to optimize it is to keep that description under 200 characters.

11. Include Keywords in Page URL

Try to refrain from using random letters and numbers in URLs (such as www.mywebsite.com/18ruf83294/aasd) as these don't make any sense to anyone – not even to Google crawlers. URLs should be customized to include a descriptive phrase or keyword so both visitors and Google know what that page is about even without the benefit of a meta description or anchor text. This also makes it easier for people to remember your website.

12. More Words, Better Navigation, Less ads

A web page's rankings depend mostly on textual content, so crawlers focus more on what is written as opposed to all the unnecessary images and annoying advertisements that can be found on it. Keep your word count preferably around 800-1500 words. More written words means more keywords and important phrases being thrown around for web crawlers to collect and index. You just have to make sure that your content is relevant and meaningful enough so it's all worth reading – which I'm sure it already is.

Hope this helps and if you find this process too tedious, feel free to check out the automated on-page personal advisor, SEOPressor (Ms. Ileane's affiliate link). This WordPress plugin is literally like having an SEO consultant right beside you, informing you of every on-page factor you need to do and the ones that you have missed out.
Until next time, happy blogging!

Tagged as: Backlinking, Keywords, Optimization tips, SEO, SEOPressor Plugin

Appendix G

Edublog Site and Link to Tutorials

- features
- schools & universities
- community

Ten Ways To Use Your Edublog – Click play for some great ideas!

Or read on for some more detail…

1. Share materials, news, downloads, links and more

Anything that you post to your blog will instantly be accessible by your students from school *and* from home. What's more, you can easily manage who gets to access them through passwords and privacy measures.

2. Facilitate online discussions and collaboration