Professional Learning and Networking Stories of Canadian TESL Practitioners Engaged in #LINCchat

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British Council ELT Master's Dissertation Awards: Commendation

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WORD COUNT: 14988

Abstract

Through the lens of narrative enquiry, this highly contextualized and practitioner-based research study tells the stories of four Canadian TESL practitioners committed to participating in a bi-monthly Twitter chat for LINC instructors and administrators (#LINCchat).

Each story brings into view individual professional learning and networking explorations on Twitter as perceived and retold by the researcher in a series of narrative sketches. ***Dori*** illustrates a practitioner's experience from reluctance to use social media to finding value in online learning and connectivity. ***Rene*** transitions from the apprehension for sharing thoughts publicly to declaring her personal goals on Twitter. ***Allison*** depicts an educator's experience from joining Twitter out of curiosity to making her learning visible through it. ***Lilly*** reveals an educator's pursuit of professional confidence and rediscovering herself while building a PLN on Twitter.

Practitioner stories in this study should be of value to all those interested in ways to diversify their professional learning and development through Twitter as well as administrators considering new opportunities for their staff. The observations emerged in the process of telling may be used as a springboard to further research related to teacher engagement in professional learning and networking using Twitter and Twitter chats. There is a hope that other TESL practitioners engaged in professional learning and networking on Twitter will be inspired to tell their own stories and contribute to the existing narrative.

Keywords: Professional Learning Networks (PLN), Twitter chats, Canadian TESL practitioners, Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

> *"We need to move beyond the idea that an education is something that is provided for us, and toward the idea that an education is something that we create for ourselves." (Downes, 2010, para. 20)*

1.1 The #LINCchat story

It's twenty to nine, Tuesday night in Ontario. I give my little girl a goodnight kiss, grab a cup of tea and hastily tweet a reminder to my PLN[1], "Do not miss #LINCchat starting in 20 min #cdnelt #cdnesl". I take one last look at the pre-assigned tweets and questions. They are ready to go! At nine sharp, my co-moderator from British Columbia, Nathan Hall posts his usual greetings and starts the #LINCchat, a bi-monthly Twitter chat[2] for LINC[3] instructors and administrators.

~ Today's #LINCchat topic is "Personal Learning Networks[4]" (@nathanghall[5])

~@---- and @nathanghall are your moderators for this #LINCchat and we will be sharing Qs throughout to keep the conversation moving (@nathanghall)

~ If you've never been a part of a Twitter chat before, feel free to jump in at any time with your thoughts or questions. #LINCchat (@nathanghall)

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[1] Connections on Twitter

[2] A live discussion on Twitter in which all those with a Twitter account can participate synchronously and/or asynchronously by including a hashtag (e.g. LINCchat) when replying to or posting a question. Hashtags allow for tweets to be categorized and sorted.

[3] Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada

[4] The tweets below are from a special daytime #LINCchat (April 22, 2016). A Storify summary is available here: https://storify.com/nathanghall/lincchat-april-22nd

[5] The author of the tweet

~ Q1: What is continuing professional learning for you? (...) #LINCchat (@nathanghall)

~ (...) It's helped me develop as a T[6] and get to a stage where I enjoy teaching as I can handle diff situations #Lincchat (@Hada_ELT)

~ A1: For me, CPD is the critical piece needed in my growth as a teacher. Can't learn everything in teacher training #LINCchat (@nathanghall)

~ @nathanghall[7] CPD is absolutely essential post qualification. It enables Ts to reflect and grow and share and learn more #lincchat (@Hada_ELT)

~ A1: It means reflecting on my practice, finding out what educators who inspire me are doing, & having a growth mindset #lincchat (@jennifermchow)

~ A1: Stay informed, connect, challenge yourself, reflect, debate, dream, trial and error, etc. #LINCchat (@LINCInstructor)

~ A1: It's the chance to learn from my colleagues from all over the world using online communities like scoopit, twitter and others #lincchat (@InnaPiankovska)

~ A1. CPD - being open to new learning #lincchat (@----)

~ A1: When I think about when I started out back when I first did my TESL cert[8]., wish these connections were possible back then #LINCchat (@nathanghall)

In 2012, a new universe of professional learning and growth opened to me as I joined Twitter and started building my personal network of like-minded educators. I noticed how popular Twitter had been among K-12 teachers in US

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[6] Teacher
[7] In reply to Nathan Hall's previous tweet
[8] Teaching English as a Second Language certification training

and Canada and hoped to connect with practitioners in my field, Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada (LINC). In 2015, I was invited to co-moderate #LINCchat, a Twitter chat intended to engage and support Canadian TESL[9] practitioners going through program delivery changes at both federal and provincial levels[10]. #LINCchat was held twice a month at 9 p.m. EST and occasionally during the day to accommodate instructors who taught night classes. Each time #LINCchat focused on a different topic (e.g., Teaching in LINC, Pragmatics, Sourcing and Using Authentic Materials, Leveraging Technology, Instructional Strategies) suggested by the members of its PLN or selected by its co-moderators, who also prepared questions in advance and facilitated the conversation during live chats.

As a co-moderator, I witnessed an exchange of ideas and sharing of resources among the core group of #LINCchat-ers (around 10 TESL professionals across Canada who regularly participated in live chats and used #LINCchat in their tweets) that were nothing less than impressive. I started wondering what motivated those teachers to connect with each other, what role Twitter connections had in their professional lives, what professional learning via Twitter chats meant to them, what stories they could share and how those stories may help us better understand practices of *today's* practitioners who are

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[9] An acronym used in Canada for Teaching English as a Second Language. In Ontario, TESL professionals may be employed in LINC (funded federally) or Adult ESL (funded provincially). In British Columbia and Manitoba, TEAL (Teaching English as an Additional Language) is used instead. To avoid confusion, in this work TESL is broadly used to describe professionals engaged in English as a Second Language instruction to adults in various programs.
[10] Since 2014, Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA) has been being implemented Canada wide in government funded programs.

using Twitter to extend and personalize their professional learning and networks (Trust, 2012: 133).

1.2 A profession of storytelling and lifelong learning

In view of the above, I sought to explore the following research question:

"What stories do Canadian TESL practitioners engaged in #LINCchat tell about their professional learning and networking?"

I started with the idea that teachers are intrinsic lifelong learners and storytellers. They learn *by doing*; in their classrooms; from each other; by sharing their stories *on the go*; telling and retelling personal observations and experiences in staff and lunchrooms, hallways and at professional development events. Big and small, teacher stories (Vasquez, 2011: 536), abounding with individual reflections and new understandings, are both an important research tool (Webster & Mertova, 2007: 25) and a means to educate others (Sacks, 1998 in Webster & Mertova, 2007: 47).

Continuing professional learning/development (CPL/CPD) is an integral part of being a professional in education and is vital to teachers' growth (Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016: 2). It is our professional responsibility as educators "to engage in meaningful [CPL/] CPD which benefits [us], [our] organization and, above all, [our] learners" (Scales, 2011: 1). To be effective, CPL/CPD must provide teachers with the opportunities to "become researchers and

developers of their own practice", engage in a dialogue with other practitioners (Scales, 2011: 1), and share their knowledge (Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016: 2). In this study, professional learning/development is referred to as a process "by which individuals take control of their own learning and development by engaging in an on-going process of reflection and action. This process is empowering and exciting and can stimulate people to achieve their aspirations and move towards their dreams" (Megginson & Whitaker, 2007 in Friedman, 2013: 11).

What professional learning and development practices individual teachers choose or create for themselves depends on various factors such as "previous experiences", "personal and professional orientations", "career stage or objectives", "home and school responsibilities" (Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016: 1). Social media platforms such as Twitter have empowered teachers by providing a medium for professional networking and learning from each other (Bozarth, 2013; Whitaker et al., 2015: 8). No longer limited by location or travel budget (Couros, 2015: 89), Twitter connected educators actively engage in "collective knowledge building" (Trust, 2012: 134) - a choice that provides and amplifies powerful learning opportunities for all those involved (Couros, 2015: 89, 174, 196).

The *journey* and *exploration* metaphors are often used to describe different approaches to CPL/CPD (Scales, 2011: 6). In the *journey* metaphor, the

destination is known in advance, but an ***exploration*** means that the end is not yet known and we might discover "places we did not know existed" (Scales, 2011: 6). The two are not exclusive and we might start with one to end with another based on the route we may take, its length, scenery, and the fellow travellers along the way (Scales, 2011: 6). The four stories of this research study depicted individual continuing professional learning and networking ***explorations*** of the four Canadian TESL practitioners using Twitter and engaged in #LINCchat. There is a hope that telling our professional learning and networking stories will motivate others to connect and share theirs.

Chapter 2. Literature review

"We have paddled our way through this vast sea we call teaching and learning on our own for way too long. The time is now for us to take responsibility for owning our professional learning by networking with individuals who share our passion and our desire to be the change!" (Whitaker et al, 2015: 13)

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to explore some of the existing stories and current knowledge shared by educators passionate about professional learning and networking via Twitter and Twitter chats. The literature review preceded data analysis and therefore informed and shaped the way stories were presented by the researcher. At the same time, the themes that emerged during data analysis resulted in further consideration of a few ideas that otherwise would not have been included.

The research question (What stories do Canadian TESL practitioners engaged in #LINCchat tell about their professional learning and networking?) led to first exploring literature related to using Twitter and Twitter chats as vehicles for professional learning and networking (2.6). As a result, the themes of a changing educational landscape (2.2), connected educator's mindset (2.3), the power of two (personal and professional) learning networks (2.4) and user-generated learning (2.5) were identified and included in this chapter.

The concept of connected educator's mindset (Whitaker et al., 2015), developed/adopted once teachers engage in professional learning and

networking on Twitter or other social media platforms, sparked my curiosity and resulted in focusing on individual transformations of the research participants during data analysis. At the same time, while working with the data and writing up the stories, my attention was drawn to the need of the institutional support as pertaining to professional learning and networking on Twitter voiced by all four participants. This resulted in adding a section dedicated to the research and other ideas related to raising the awareness around these professional learning and networking practices as well as documenting the ways teachers around the world engage in them (2.7).

2.2 A changing professional learning landscape

The reality is that practitioners nowadays often do not have time to participate in classroom-based professional development or wait for an expert to become available to deliver such sessions (Koper, 2009: 4; Ross et al., 2015: 56). In order to keep up with "the changing educational landscape" (Whitaker et al., 2015: 29), practicing teachers around the world are choosing to expand their professional learning opportunities by stepping outside their comfort zones and engaging in user-generated, networked learning (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013: 16; Ross et al., 2015: 55; Swanson, 2013: 14; Trust, 2012: 138; Whitaker et al., 2015:13).

Among professionals in education, Twitter has become one of their "preferred ways to learn and share new ideas" (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013: 16, 18). Connected educators on Twitter create "a system of interpersonal connections

and resources" (Trust, 2012: 133) which supports informal, user-generated and networked learning available anytime and anywhere (Swanson, 2013: 11; Whitaker et al., 2015: 29). Together, they are exploring "the boundaries of their teaching practice" as well as providing each other with the adjacent possibilities of growth and innovation (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013: 18; Ross et al., 2015: 59; Couros, 2015: 52).

There is a strong belief that it is important for educators to be able to navigate and feel "comfortable learning in online spaces" in order to be able "to adequately prepare students for modern, technology-rich environments" (Swanson, 2013: 13; Ross et al., 2015: 55). Although "many teachers are afraid of their digital footprint", engaging in professional learning online may only enhance it (Swanson, 2013: 39). For some of them, the decisions to embrace these forms of networked learning have become life altering and led to the pinnacle of their careers (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013: 16; King, 2011 in Ross et al., 2015: 57).

2.3 The connected educator mindset

Whitaker et al. (2015: xxiii) suggest that being "a connected educator is a mindset more than anything else" and it is based on certain underlying principles. In summary, connected educators "recognize that educational landscape has changed"; they use technology and social media to establish networks of like-minded practitioners for both personal and professional learning and growth; they do not "look down on their colleagues" instead they

seek to grow "through continuous improvement"; they know that "the best people from who to learn are other educators facing similar issues" (Whitaker et al., 2015: xxiii, 17, 29). In other words, they self-identify as "perpetual learners" (Trust, 2012: 138; Wesely, n.d.: 313) who are "modeling lifelong learning" to their learners and colleagues (Whitaker et al., 2015:11).

Connected educators approach creating their PLN with a "service mindset", which means that they connect with each other to serve a greater cause of bettering themselves to meet the needs of their students and colleagues (Whitaker et al., 2015: 3, 7). They "know they cannot learn it all on their own so they work intentionally to establish a network of fellow lifelong learners" (Whitaker et al., 2015: 11) in a pursuit of "connected, collaborative, and interactive meaning making" opportunities (Ross et al., 2015: 58). Growing a PLN contributes to shifting one's mindset from a negative self-perception that no one cares what we have to say to a positive view that we should take pride in our unique talents and experiences and that others can and will learn from us (Whitaker et al., 2015: 6).

2.4 The power of two learning networks

"Even though we have yet to meet, and despite the distance separating us, I know you, and you know me." (Weston, 2015: para. 5)

Whitaker et al. (2015: 1-13) emphasize the importance of investing time in establishing personal and professional learning networks by teachers, who often find themselves isolated behind their classrooms doors (Whitaker et al.,

2015: 1; Weston, 2015, para. 1; Wesely, n.d., 312) and "like any other professionals", require "peer-to-peer interactions" in order to grow and develop (Whitaker et al., 2015: 2). It is believed that through interactions with their PLN educators are mutually encouraged to strive for continuous improvement that is imperative to professional growth and innovation (Couros, 2015: 89, 174, 196). In a similar vein, they are developing their "adaptive expertise" (Trust, 2012: 138), which empowers them to be "specialists in retrieving, organising, utilising, and reconsidering their professional knowledge and beliefs" (Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016: 2).

> *"Teachers that have adaptive expertise are willing to be flexible and grow with the changes they face. (…) Teachers perform self-assessment to see where they can improve and then use their PLN to find information and connect with others who will help them…"* (Trust, 2012: 138).

Whitaker et al. (2015: 2) point out that both ***personal*** and ***professional*** are equally important in building learning networks and refer to them as P²LN – "P to the Power of 2". The relational aspect of the PLN on Twitter is very similar and not less important as the one of a traditional school setting (Whitaker et al., 2015: 88). ***Professional*** relationships that start online often lead to strong ***personal*** connections (Whitaker et al., 2015: 33; Weston, 2015). Weston (2015) uses a "Velcro strip" metaphor to describe the power of connections that teachers "disconnected within their workplace" experience on Twitter (para. 6). "Connecting with people, who validate and inspire the teacher to

grow and think anew" motivates them to expand their PLN (Weston, 2015, para. 6).

> *"The connection she experiences is a match waiting to happen and meant to be. So, with each ensuing tweet, like, retweet, and direct-message the teacher's feelings of disenfranchisement, marginalization, and isolation abate. A Skype session or Google hangout awaits them, as do edCamps, meetUps, and unconferences." (Weston, 2015: para. 5)*

2.5 User-generated and networked professional learning

Many educators who are passionate about networked learning online have said that they may learn more in shorter time on Twitter "than hours in [all staff] professional development sessions" at their organizations (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013: 19). In contrast to traditional models of PD that are often oriented towards common needs of "educators in attendance" (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013: 18), networked learning provides a fluid space for addressing individual teacher's needs and emerging issues (Swanson 2013: 12). In this type of learning, "professional learning curiosity" (Ross et al., 2015: 57) is empowered by "an instant access to information and thousands of individuals with an array of expertise" (Trust, 2012: 133).

User-generated and networked learning is a three-part process, which engages participants in active curation/searching, reflection/evaluation and contribution/sharing (Swanson, 2013: 5, 8). Within a PLN, connected teachers are helping each other solve individual problems by effortlessly sharing their

resources, filtering the most relevant content and providing feedback to each other (Swanson, 2013: 6, 21; Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013: 18; Trust, 2012: 138).

Curation has become very popular with practitioners actively "embracing their positive digital footprints" and starting to openly sharing their practices and resources (Swanson, 2013: 41). It is a highly social and engaging sharing process and doing it together with the people who share the same interests keeps a connected educator engaged (Swanson, 2013: 30). The PLN may deliver 'the best' content to a connected educator, but it is the responsibility of each individual to evaluate it (Swanson, 2013: 23). In fact, curation and evaluation is one way in which educators can express their voice and "have a say in what they consume, what is delivered to them, and what they choose to assimilate in their own practice" (Swanson, 2013: 29).

Reflection is an integral part of teaching and learning; educators who make a habit of reflecting on their practices "produce better student outcomes" (Swanson, 2013: 50). Connected educators use online spaces to openly reflect on their practices and share their professional successes and struggles (Whitaker et al. 2015: 36). The decision to expose one's vulnerability by making their mistakes, fears or failures public is perceived as an act of personal and professional growth (Whitaker et al. 2015: 36). Swanson suggests that "reflection is a precursor to productive sharing" and collaboration; in order to

be able to share with others, first teachers need to become comfortable with what is happening in their classrooms and their minds (Swanson, 2013: 51).

2.6 Twitter: a vehicle for professional learning and connectivity

Although frequently misunderstood as "a digital home for attention-starved celebrities" (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013: 18), Twitter has become a "go to tool for connectivity" (Whitaker et al, 2015:4, 19). "A growing legion of connected educators" (Whitaker et al., 2015: 8) engage in user-generated professional learning within their Twitter PLN (Swanson, 2013: 86) "to fill the gaps in their face-to-face professional development" (Ross et al., 2015: 58) by learning what, when, how and how much they want (Carpenter & Krutka, 2016: 716; Langhorst, 2015: 34; Skyring, 2013: 153; Swanson, 2013: 6).

Ross et al. (2015: 55) conducted "a study to examine how educators use Twitter to extend their professional development opportunities and whether there is a sense of fulfillment from networked learning as opposed to traditional means of learning". The survey respondents indicated that they used Twitter "because it saved time in sharing information" (92%) and they sought "to get encouragement from others" (86%); among those educators who used Twitter as a support network for encouragement, 108 identified that they felt "a sense of belonging" (Ross et al., 2015: 64). Ross et al. (2015: 73) concluded that it is through the use and management of their PLN that educators are engaging in professional development opportunities on Twitter.

Similar studies reported that educators use Twitter in a variety of ways to extend their PD (e.g., sharing and acquiring resources, collaboration and networking, participation in Twitter chats) and praised its personalized, collaborative and immediate professional learning opportunities (Ross et al., 2015; Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Budak & Agrawal, 2013; Langhorst, 2015). Carpenter and Krutka (2015: 722) pointed out that in the profession that is often associated with burnout, de-skilling and isolation, teachers referred to Twitter "as a space of enthusiasm, invigoration, empowerment and connection".

Twitter chats have been recognized as one of the most powerful ways for educators to build and personalize their connections, make meaningful contributions to their PLN (Whitaker et al. 2015: 7, 20; Swanson 2013: 67, 69) and engage in synchronous collaborative learning discussions (Ross et al., 2015: 71). Studies related to participation in Twitter chats established that educators "lauded the camaraderie associated with chats, the caliber of educators participating" (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015: 717) along with "the diversity in backgrounds and geographical locations of the participants" (Budak and Agrawal, 2013).

Langhorst (2015) explored a Twitter chat for teachers in social studies (#sschat) through the lens of the community of practice theory and concluded that #sschat sessions met "the three basic requirements for a group to be

categorized as a community of practice" such as 1) a "collection" of professionals practicing in the same field 2) regularly meeting "to share their knowledge" 3) in an area of interest (Wenger, 1991 in Langhorst, 2015: 77). Compared to a traditional PD experience which is typically dominated by the presenter of information, #sschat "provided a more interactive, two-sided conversation" (Langhorst, 2015: 77-78).

2.7 Institutional support and recognition

Despite the fact that more and more teachers and their administrators are engaging in user-generated, networked learning and beginning to serve as national and international thought leaders, this form of professional learning is still perceived as informal or nontraditional and hardly recognized as valid PD (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013: 20; Langhorst, 2015: 30; Ross et al., 2015: 58). Working towards changing the existing perception, Ferriter and Provenzano (2013: 20) encourage teachers engaged in these forms of PD to "document the effect that non-traditional learning" have had on their practice. A number of recent studies dedicated to developing a better understanding of educator engagement in PD using Twitter in relation to popular adult learning theories have reported the existing need to further explore and demonstrate the effectiveness and validity of this modality of PD at the institutional level (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Ross et al., 2015; Skyring, 2013; Swanson, 2013).

Skyring (2013) explores teacher engagement in microblogging[11] through the lens of social constructivism and points out that education is shifting toward systems that support the idea that everyone should be a learner and a teacher at the same time and the learner is the one who creates and discovers what is to be learned (Rogers et al., in Skyring, 2013: 25). Ross et al. (2015: 57) refer to the learning principles of connectivism based the assumption that "learning and knowledge rest in the diversity of opinions through the formation of connections" to theorize the concepts behind PLN and professional growth through Twitter. They state that effective PD "should be praxis oriented, allowing educators to continually learn from each other as they engage in interplay of reflection and action" (Reich et al., 2011 in Ross et al., 2015: 57), characteristic of the professional learning opportunities and connections created through "the seemingly trivial clicks, tweets, chats, and hangouts" (Weston, 2015, para. 8).

Swanson, an advocate of professional learning in online spaces, explores the user-generated learning through the prism of andragogy and identified that it matches the principles of the adult learning theory (2013: 9). Dunlap and Lowenthal (2009: 129) attend to the "socialness of learning" and recommended using Twitter in the design of online courses to enhance their interactivity. Ross et al. (205: 74) conclude their study with the recommendation to warrant the "inclusion of education related activity on Twitter within the definition of

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[11] Use of Twitter

professional development" and call for administrators to "allow the educators to use Twitter as a viable means for on-campus professional development". Along the same vein, Couros (2015: 196) suggests that if "connected learning is valued as something that makes an impact on the learning for students" there should be "opportunities for educators to connect with their PLNs to address their specific interests and questions" within their working time.

2.8 Summary

Recent studies (Budak & Agrawal, 2013; Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Ross et al., 2015; Langhorst, 2015; Skyring, 2015; Wesely, n.d.) have shown that education practitioners around the world are reimagining their professional growth and career advancement by creating non-traditional, user-generated and networked professional learning opportunities through online social spaces and contributing to the establishment of a connected-educator mindset by sharing their personal and professional stories, experiences and accomplishments. There is a need of extended, in-depth studies of the ways educators in various fields engage in professional learning and networking on Twitter. Further research on the unique characteristics of such practices and the impact they may have on an individual's teaching growth, student success, colleagues and institution is necessary in order to justify their value and recognition as valid PD (Budak & Agrawal, 2013; Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Ferriter & Provenazo, 2013; Ross et al., 2015). The stories in this research study will provide a glimpse into individual transformations experienced by four Canadian TESL practitioners while using Twitter for professional learning and

networking and will further contribute to understanding and documenting these practices.

Chapter 3. Methodology

In this chapter, I will reflect and elaborate on the methodological underpinnings of this research study.

3.1 Narrative inquiry paradigm

... we live by stories,
we also live in them....
If we change the stories we live by,
Quite possibly we change our lives

(Okri, 1997 in Green et al., 2013: 247)

The principal research question of this study (What stories do Canadian TESL practitioners engaged in #LINCchat tell about their professional learning and networking?) led to exploring and then adopting the narrative inquiry paradigm as the core "tool and medium" of this research project (Conle, 2000: 49). Through the lens of storytelling, I pursued to gather and reveal professional learning and networking experiences (Barr & Clark, 2012: 44) of four Canadian TESL practitioners whom I have known from their participation in #LINCchat and who have consequently become a part of my own PLN on Twitter.

Experience is key in narrative inquiries and it is viewed as a continuum: people are individuals who live in social contexts and whose experiences continuously transform the understanding of their existence (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 2). In this study, practitioner narrative was used as a research space to observe

individual experiences and transformations as related to the continuum of professional learning and networking on Twitter and within #LINCchat (Webster and Mertova, 2007: 20) and then retell those stories so that others may gain from their interpretations (Barr & Clark, 2012: 44).

Narratives are tridimensional (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 51). Stories from the **past** are told as we understand them in **present** and offer a possibility for **future** retelling and inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 60). Each professional learning and networking story in this study is "plurivocal" (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979/1987 in Riessman, 1993, 14) and whether it is perceived unique or common will be at the discretion of the reader who brings own consciousness and past experiences to its interpretation (Barr & Clark, 2012: 42; Riessman, 1993: 66).

3.2 Purposeful sampling

Purposeful sampling was used "to select and recruit participants for their personal experiences with the phenomenon" under study (Koch et al., 2014: 136). Research participants were deliberately selected to gather in-depth data (Perry, 2011: 65) as pertaining to professional learning and networking experiences of 1) a Canadian TESL practitioner 2) actively engaged in #LINCchat, both synchronously and asynchronously. I have chosen the four individuals from the core group of #LINCchat participants to include a variety of LINC teaching situations across Canada, namely one-on-one online home

study, face-to-face day and night, and blended. I was curious to learn their stories: how they began using Twitter, what experiences they had and how those experiences might have changed their existing perceptions. I believed that their proven commitment to #LINCchat PLN coupled with various teaching backgrounds, would generate "rich descriptions of their experiences, practices, and perspectives" (Koch et al., 2014: 136) about professional learning and networking using Twitter.

3.3 Data generation through in-depth interviews

For data generation (i.e. practitioner narrative, rich in recollections and reflections), a natural choice was made to use the in-depth (narrative) interviews. Recognizing that "an interview is a shared product of **what** the two people talk about and **how** they talk together" (Josselson, 2013: 1), the researcher designed a space for the participants to reflect on their experiences and tell their stories which each them did in the light of their understanding of the purpose and familiarity with the process.

> *"I (…) didn't have a discussion like this about Twitter, so some of the things that I am saying (…) I haven't actually put them into words. (…) I have never been asked to shape my ideas to get to certain concepts but it's there in my head (…). When I said 'all those people working for me', I'm sure I haven't used that before but it just came naturally because that's what they are doing, right…"*
> (Rene, 75-83[12])

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[12] Numbers indicating corresponding lines in the interview transcript

In terms of **what** the two people talk about, the interviewer has a part in generating data by framing the questions (Gergen, 2009 in Josselson, 2013: 2; Riessman, 1993: 54-55). In planning the interview and drafting its schedule, the works of Webster & Mertova (2007) and Josselson (2013) were particularly influential. Josselson (2013: xi) cautions us that too much structure may result in learning facts rather than meanings and identifies a need of a balanced structure in order to be able to learn about the uniqueness of the participants and their experiences as pertaining to areas of interest of a research study. I started with the kind of stories I would like to learn from the practitioners engaged in #LINCchat and then used it to outline my interview (see 1.1 Appendix 1). Recognizing that "a narrative interview is open-ended and extended" (Josselson, 2013: xi), I draw from a question framework proposed by Webster & Mertova (2007: 86) to create questions that would encourage reflection on and recollection of significant events. I drafted a list of principal and funnel questions (see 1.2 Appendix 1) with the idea that I would let the interviewee speak freely and would use the funnel questions as needed to guide participants who required prompts (Riessman, 1992: 55) so that conversation continued (Barr & Clark, 2012: 44).

In terms of **how** the two people talk, Josselson (2013: x, xii) identified that "the depth and meanings" of what the interviewee narrates "depends on what is happening in the actual interview situation and is influenced by the dynamics of the research relationship". I must acknowledge that my presence in Canadian

TESL community on Twitter (i.e. #LINCchat) as well as my online interactions with the four research participants have had an important bearing on the development and findings of this project. All of the participants had been a part of my own PLN on Twitter for at least one year and had known me as a co-moderator of #LINCchat, which may have been a factor in their willingness to participate and share their experiences the way they did:

"I'll be honest with you everybody is really busy and I accepted to do this because (…) I respect you (…) So initially I thought, yea (…) I'm totally willing to help (…) but now I realize that actually I have gained a lot from it, it gave me a chance to reflect on what I'm doing and (…) I was surprised of some of the things that I said …" (Rene, 561-570)

With one of the participants (Lilly's story), we had met before in a similar format for a different interview. I felt that our previous experience contributed to establishing a relationship of trust between us, which in turn created a deeper and more personal conversation. I sensed that my respondent revealed certain experiences and feelings that she might have not shared under different circumstances.

3.4 Setting the online interviews

The existent protocol was followed to obtain the Research Risk and Ethics Assessment (RREA) authorisation through the University to conduct the interviews. Via a direct message on Twitter, the participants were invited, on an individual basis, to participate in online interviews using a live video

conferencing platform BigBlueButton (BBB) available to Canadian TESL practitioners through Tutela.ca. Preceding the interview, each participant received and signed a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form via email. At the beginning of each interview, I briefly explained the purpose of the research emphasizing that their individual experiences, feelings, observations, and thoughts were at the heart of this study. The interview questions (1.2. Appendix 1) were used to prompt and guide reflection when it was necessary. In general, I found that the research participants were eager to share their experiences since they considered professional learning and networking to be an important part of their practices:

"Actually, I'm enjoying this (…) because I realize that it's a really important part of my professional life and I have never really talked like that about it, so it also helps me kind of clarify some of my thoughts which is interesting…" (Rene, 258-261)

3.5 Data transcription

"Crunching text requires text to first be put in crunchable form" (Van Maanen, 1988 in Riessman, 1993: 56). I transcribed each interview manually recognizing that transcription from oral to written language is in fact the first stage of the data analysis (Kvale, 2007: 94). A three-column chart was used to record a) the line number, b) verbatim transcription and c) my personal memos. While transcribing the conversation, I only included some of the paralinguistic features that I felt were essential to relay the depth of meaning

(e.g., laughing while talking about an embarrassing situation or revealing personal insecurities; crying while revealing a deeply personal insight).

While transcribing, I highlighted in red segments of the narrative (column b) that I perceived as being critical or transformational in the interviewee's experience and recorded a memo (column c) with a brief explanation to why a particular instance/incident "jumped out" (Heidegger, 1927/1962 in Riessman, 1993: 57) along with any "inner feelings, reactions, remembered stories" invoked by it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 86). These memos were then used as a rough outline for each part of the story (Appendix 3) and helped to distinguish its metaphor/theme, beginning and conclusion (Riessman 1993: 44).

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis implies transformation (Gibbs, 2007: 1). Trying to capture the richness and multiple meanings of the experiences that emerged in conversations with the four participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 80), I took the ideographic approach focusing on the individual and the "interplay of factors that might be quite specific to that individual" (Gibbs, 2007: 4).

I applied "the burrowing of critical events" (reflecting and making meaning of an instance that appeared to have had a profound effect on the participants' experiences), to recreate a few **narrative sketches** (snapshots of events that led to a profound effect and consolidated with participant's own words), which

then were used to underpin each story (Webster & Mertova, 2007: 87). After the first transcription, I went back to the parts highlighted in red (preliminary identified as significant or critical to the interviewee's experiences) and scrutinized the events that had led to what seemed to be a "flashpoint" of that teacher's professional learning and networking exploration (Woods, 1993 in Webster & Mertova, 2007: 84). In some cases, I had to play back and re-transcribe the segment under study to grasp a more subtle or profound instance (Riessman, 1993: 57). An example of the process can be seen in Appendix 4.

3.7 Stories of Dori, Rene, Allison and Lilly

"Like weight bearing walls, personal narratives depend on certain structures to hold them together." (Riessman, 1993: 18)

Each story in this research study is a product of a joint effort by the practitioner who shared them and the researcher who told those stories in a way that made the most meaning to her in the moment of telling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 71). Each story was perceived as a practitioner's ***exploration*** of the new territory of professional learning and networking on Twitter. Within the exploration frame, practitioner narrative was reconstructed to answer three basic questions:

a) What was its starting point?

b) What happened along the way?

 c) What was the destination?

Practitioner stories in Chapters 4-7 follow a predetermined structure (Riessman, 1993: 18-20) and include common elements such as introduction (summary of the participants teaching experience and current situation and what their professional learning and networking exploration is about); three or four sections (comprised of narrative sketches sequenced to tell the story of that exploration); and conclusion (significance of the events and individual transformations as perceived by the researcher). Storytelling through narrative inquiry offers multiple opportunities to include participants' voices by incorporating their language and quotes in the final narrative told by the researcher. I used pseudonyms (Dori, Rene, Allison and Lilly) and line numbers to indicate the part of the transcript from which ideas or quotes were drawn (e.g., Rene, 7-15).

3.8 Positioning the researcher

Narrative inquirers work within the tridimensional space of storytelling not only with their participants but also with themselves (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 61). Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 62) caution us that in narrative inquiry it is "self-deceptive" to stay silent as a researcher or position as an idealized and disengaged self. A researcher's own stories and interpretations are embedded within the language used in the story, what the story covers and what has been omitted (Riessman, 1993: 65), which is "representative of our present-day teller's point of view" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 61). As researchers 'we are shaping the parade of events as we study them' (Clandinin

& Connelly, 2000: 87) and are responsible for the final product of the study (Clandinin & Connelly 2000: 61; Riessman, 1993: 67).

This is a highly contextualized study whose "plotlines" were shaped by the researcher's attachment to Canadian TESL community of practice on Twitter and #LINCchat co-moderation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 121). I started this research project with a strong belief in the power of continuing professional learning and networking on Twitter and the importance of such practices for individual professional growth. These considerations predetermined my choice of the narrative enquiry route of documenting and analysing individual practitioner experiences which I perceived as valuable and worthwhile sharing with others in the field (Josselson, 2013: xi).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 63) point out that researchers embark on a new project in the midst of living their own stories. I completed a short questionnaire from Josselson (2013:14) in order to learn my own story (Appendix 2) before listening to and reliving stories of others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 71). The practitioner narrative in the interviews revealed some similarities and certain differences in relation to my own experiences. I noticed that those instances that I perceived as either similar or different sparked most reflection and consideration and therefore have become central to this research study. While reconstructing practitioner stories to answer the primary question of this research study, secondary observations as pertaining to researcher

curiosity and themes emerged in the literature review (Chapter 2) were made and summarized in Chapter 8.

This work is a collaborative narrative developed by all its contributors (including the four TESL practitioners, myself and my research supervisor) but told by one narrator – myself - through the lens of my own understanding of this research matter and the current stage of my personal and professional growth (Webster & Mertova, 2007: 18). In the four stories, I sought to reveal "individual truths" as narrated by Canadian TESL practitioners about their professional learning on Twitter and reflect on critical events that in my understanding have been transformational and may inform future research (Bohl, 1995 in Webster & Mertova, 2007: 74). I perceived the final product of this research to be an original narrative incorporating practitioner's vivid experiences and voices (Webster & Mertova, 2007: 19) and opening "new possibilities for further research" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990 in Webster & Mertova, 2007: 88) rather than producing "conclusions of certainty" (Webster & Mertova, 2007: 90).

Chapter 4. Dori's story: Mastering a new skill

4.1 Introduction

Dori is a LINC instructor in an online home study program. She started teaching in 1996 and joined Twitter in October 2012. She has been organizing and delivering face-to-face PD sessions for more than 15 years. Dori's story illustrates an educator's transition from reluctance to use social media to finding value in online learning and connectivity.

4.2 Getting social online

Although Dori recognized that it was important in her new role to connect with fellow practitioners and develop a professional presence on social media, she perceived it as an imposition, a burden and one more skill to master (2-12). Grudgingly, out of necessity to promote her new program's services, but also out of worry that she might be "left behind" if not trying it out, she decided to "get on board" and learn how to use Twitter (23-25).

"I remember (…) not wanting to do it (…) I remember thinking (…) this is one more thing I have to do. I'm already pretty busy. I do not need this (…) I have plenty of people here that I know." (2-5)

In the beginning, Dori found Twitter to be fast and overwhelming. Trying to manage its avalanche of information and process tweets that were of relevance to her, Dori limited her connections to TESL professionals whose work she

might have heard of or with whom she might have met in person at a conference or a workshop (27-29).

> *"I felt overwhelmed. I felt it was impersonal. (...) None of it came naturally.*
> *(...) It felt like I was older than everybody else..." (12-18)*

Once she felt more comfortable navigating Twitter streams, Dori started expanding her connections. In a matter of seconds by clicking on a Twitter profile, she was able to learn about an individual's teaching context and interests and used that information to decide whether or not to continue their professional conversation. On Twitter, Dori found it to be extremely easy to connect with like-minded practitioners in contrast to face-to-face conferences where she thought it was impossible "to get *that much* information about each other from *that many* people" (98-102).

> *"Face to face you can not click on their forehead and find out ... it takes*
> *time and (...) you have to make that emphasis to ask those questions and pull it*
> *out of them. I don't know... I just feel like once you are there and you find the right*
> *chat or forum for you, it's easier and faster (...) I feel that you have that*
> *community built quicker than you would have face-to-face." (120-128)*

4.3 Stepping into Twitter chats

Teaching from home most of the time, Dori felt isolated from other teachers in her program and soon became interested in Twitter chats. Similar to professional conferences, she saw the opportunity to meet new people outside of her regular contacts and learn fresh ideas she would have not encountered otherwise (56-62). Dori happily embraced #LINCchat, which appealed to her with its Canadian context and the fact that many of the #LINCchat participants had already been in her PLN (66-75). When she joined her first #LINCchat, Dori saw that those engaged made an extra effort to support each other (149). Dori was surprized how quickly she progressed to being comfortable with other regular #LINCchat-ers (250-53) and feeling as a part of a fairly strong community (260-261). She started encouraging others to join her in #LINCchat (136-140).

> *"It's not the same. Because it's an online format, I find people go out of their way to respond to what you said.* (…) *Unlike in a session, if you are in a session, when you say something people just look at you and smile, but in a Twitter chat everybody or at least 5 people will say something nice about it and then share something of theirs and that doesn't happen face-to-face as often."*
> *(142-149).*

Dori began to think that resources shared by her #LINCchat PLN were worth exploring and, unlike before when she thought that she did not have time to do that, she made an effort to peruse the link, resource or tool shared by a fellow #LINCchat-er. In one of the #LINCchat sessions, Dori herself shared a link to a

free audio recorder that she had been using with her students online. In reply to her tweet, a fellow #LINCchat-er pointed out that with that particular web tool came unwanted advertising which students might see and provided a *cleaner* alternative. Without any hesitation, she clicked and explored the link (203-210). Dori and her students loved the new audio recorder and have been using it ever since. At that point, Dori was amazed how easy it was to learn and share new tools: she didn't have to go to a conference or register for a workshop; it only took one tweet to discover a new worthy resource for her class (207-208).

"I think they are all inspiring. They are all doing amazing stuff and they all come to share something. And I follow up on after. You know, when somebody shares a link, I read them all after because it's totally worthwhile. (...) They are all (...) great teachers who have a lot to share and I think everybody has that ... maybe Twitter brought it out of them, or maybe Twitter just helped me connect with them. ... And it's probably easiest PD that I do and the most useful, most applicable ..." (241-49)

4.4 What has changed for Dori?

Despite the fact that Dori is still struggling with keeping up with live chats on Twitter and thinks that everybody else is more eloquent in their tweets than she will ever be (264-67), Dori looks forward to #LINCchats (230). She discovered the joy of getting access to tools tested out in her fellows' classrooms as well as sharing her own repertoire of teaching resources. She is

no longer intimidated to respond to what other participants say; instead it feels like sitting and talking with a "bunch of friends in a coffee shop" (231-33).

"I'm more willing to try new things. Online things. (…). It doesn't feel like work anymore. And that's half the battle right … doing it." (178-183)

For the past 15 years Dori has been mentoring new teachers and facilitating teaching methodology workshops (293-296). Her participation in #LINCchat expanded the scope of her face-to-face sessions. Dori feels that there is more than just her own classroom experience to share, and among other things, she started including the ideas and experiences that she encountered online from her PLN as well as showing other teachers how to find relevant information (296-300).

"It's not just about helping people with their class, but it's helping them to be more autonomous in their own PD and find what they need and what they are looking for. It's just like what we do with our students, trying to make them more autonomous learners… And some people need to be pulled through. " (309-316)

Dori believes that her participation in Twitter chats has taken her to the next level of community engagement (333-334). Since #LINCchat, she has become more comfortable presenting before the unfamiliar audiences all across Canada (338-342). At the same time, Dori's active engagement online resulted in her greater familiarity with *faces and names* in the TESL profession (342-347). She also felt that she wanted to share her experiences and feeling of being

comfortable and belonging to a bigger community of practice with others in her field (348-350).

> *"... I'm slowly moving more to the active side. And I think the #LINCchat forces you to do that because if you are just watching and you are not saying anything it's like screaming at you. Screaming maybe isn't the right word, but you feel like I'm the only one, I got to say something, right? Whereas in a workshop, nobody is saying anything except for the presenter, usually. It's that everybody's doing it kind of mentally. So you think OK, and then the more you do it, the easier it gets. It's fun, it's rewarding, and it's educational. It get's you there." (323-330)*

4.5 Conclusion

Once Dori overcame the hump of thinking that she did not have time to connect online, she discovered new professional learning opportunities and felt that she herself became "more proactive, more of an autonomous learner, more willing to try" new things online and use them in her classroom (178-191). What Dori initially perceived as "impersonal" connections transformed into a supportive "community of friends and colleagues across the country" that she feels now comfortable approaching with questions in her area of work (50-53). She has been more recognizable at professional conferences and events (41-44) and it has been easier for her to meet new people face-to-face.

Chapter 5. Rene's story: Surfing the ocean of Twitter

5.1 Introduction

Rene teaches English to newcomers to Canada at an Adult Continuing Education program offered through a School Board during the day. She started teaching in 1982 and joined Twitter in 2012. She believes that it is a teacher's direct responsibility to implement technology in their classes. Rene's professional learning exploration takes her from being apprehensive about connecting with strangers and sharing own thoughts publicly to setting up and declaring her personal goals before the whole world on Twitter.

5.2 A cautious start

Although Rene "clicked" with Twitter almost instantly (5), she did not feel comfortable sharing her own thoughts publicly or following people she did not know personally. She used Twitter exclusively for curation, occasionally re-tweeting or quoting someone's tweet. She felt the pressure of being in the public eye and was worried that whatever she posted would remain there forever (51-58).

*"It took me **a while** to get to the point where I felt like now I can make a comment or I can put something there that comes from me (...). And you ask yourself, 'Do I really have anything to say worth saying?'" (55-59)*

Rene was very selective and careful about whom she followed and was followed by and what content she shared. She took time to explore profiles and feeds of

people who followed her and blocked individuals who had tweets that did not meet her standards or contradicted her personal values (136-147). Rene believed that each action tells something about a person and therefore never followed back without doing a minimal screening of that individual's Twitter feed (148-154).

"I would always go to the account (...) have a look (...) at the tweets because they tell a story right away. It's one of the easiest things (...) Just look at someone's tweets (...) and it gives you a pretty good idea about that person's interests. I do think that it's kind of my online identity. But my online identity is **who I am***, right? It's not just online, it's* **me***..." (129-136; 154-155)*

Most of the time Rene interacted with others by re-tweeting the content that she liked (6-7). She felt that the moment she re-tweeted a tweet she established a connection and opened an indirect dialogue with the person who had originally shared it. Liking and re-tweeting became a way for her to acknowledge that she agreed with the content and thank the person for posting it (8-10). As Rene continued to familiarize herself with the new territory, she started to feel more confident about her own presence and place in 'Twitterverse' (85-88). She realized that she could not continue worrying about other people watching her and gradually started expressing her own opinions. Remaining cautious about what she posted, she created multiple accounts for networking, teaching and personal purposes (104-105).

" *<It's like> being in the ocean (...) When I am in the ocean I have a special feeling. (...) In the beginning when I started learning how to surf, having this kind of (...) fear that this is huge, that I have absolutely no control over it... But also really fascinated about it ... But then the more I did it, I started getting confidence and just feeling WOW this is my world too (...) I'm part of this. I'm not just witnessing something... I'm doing it! I'm living here!" (91-99)*

5.3 Growing personal and professional PLN

Rene was very excited about this "whole new universe" that unexpectedly opened to her (11-12) and was fascinated by the huge amount of information and knowledge available at her fingertips (37-38). With time, she became more open to following new people who she believed were 'experts in the field' or whose posts or profiles resonated with her own beliefs (187) and seemed to offer meaningful conversations and exchange of practices (164-168). As her PLN expanded, Rene felt that she was no longer doing all the searching alone, that other professionals were working together with her to search for content and ideas. She considered content coming from the 'experts' worth exploring and her own searches became faster and more efficient (39-48).

"You start seeing tweets from those people and you realize, 'Hey, that's the way I think'. You have this connection (...) 'WOW! We are interested in a lot of similar things'. You start getting comfortable (...) you learn from each other and get excited when (...) looking for an answer (...) [you find it] from one of those people [and realize] that's exactly what I was looking for... (164-168; 178-185)

Although Rene wasn't eager to share things from her personal life on Twitter, she found herself appreciating other professionals revealing their personalities in a very delicate manner by adding a personal touch to their tweets (195-201). She felt as if she was encouraged to connect with the person if she had a glimpse of their human side (202-203). In turn, Rene started sharing little things that she personally enjoyed. Once she took a picture of a beautiful sunset and felt the urge to share her moment of joy with others on Twitter. Gradually, she started sharing her personal goals and successes with her PLN. When Rene decided to challenge herself by running a half-marathon, she posted her intentions on Twitter. She wasn't worried what others would think of her anymore; she started using her online space to motivate herself.

"… One of my colleagues said to me at work (…), 'Oh, I saw that you put it out there, like aren't you nervous, you said it in front of the whole world. What are you going to do? Why? What if you can't do it?'" (222-226)

5.4 Jumping into #LINCchat

Once again, Rene felt apprehensive to the idea of participating in a live chat and especially of making a mistake in front of her peers. Nevertheless, she decided to jump right into it and experiment with it. In the beginning, it felt confusing and almost "dizzying" (449, 452). Rene was frustrated with herself that she could not be as fast as others (509-518). She decided to go at her own pace and do as much as she could during the live session and when it was over she

reviewed the tweets she might have missed and replied to relevant ideas (454-457). It took Rene a few #LINCchat sessions to get more comfortable and find a way to better keep track of what was happening there (457-463).

"I remember the first time I did that (…) I just kind of jumped into it because at that point (…) I have gained confidence… I do not have time, there are so many things I want to learn … so I'm just gonna jump in and try." (444-449)

In a short time, Rene realized that there was a core group of regular participants in #LINCChat, which increased her level of comfort and in a way helped her enjoy it even more. It felt like she was getting together with familiar faces (478-480). She appreciated when people re-tweeted her tweets during a live #LINCchat and tried to show her support to others by liking and re-tweeting in turn (474-477). Rene also cheered the new people who joined in and continued to interact with them as long as they made an effort to participate (492-505).

" … Those small things like the fact that someone re-tweets or likes your tweet… It's incredible how much it matters… Even to a professional who's confident (…) it still matters. It's almost like I said something and people are listening to me, it's not just out there in the void. (…) In #LINCchat, that's happening a lot. That I like." (469-474)

In the beginning, Rene thought it was essential to review each topic in advance and prepare for each live chat discussion. However, with time, she also got less

worried about not being prepared with academic research for each #LINCchat and found talking about things that practitioners did in their classes equally useful and satisfying (526-535). She felt that she found her personal teaching support group and always left #LINCchat with something worthwhile (539-544).

"Teaching is most of the time lonely. You (...) might spend a few minutes [over] lunch with colleagues, depends on the location... Once you get into your room (...) you do your own thing... People don't really have time to talk (...) At the end of the day (...) they have their own things to prep or go home. So, even though you are in the same school, there aren't that many opportunities to share face-to-face. (...) You go back[13] to recognize it's there, it's nice to see the faces. (...) It's almost like a support group, not to mention that you get great ideas from it."
(519-526; 537-538)

5.5 A tough sell

While Rene was fascinated by the resources discovered on Twitter through her PNL and spent a lot of time researching, tweeting and re-tweeting, she was surprised to hear from some of her colleagues that they perceived it as a waste of time (229-239). Rene was so excited about the opportunities that Twitter offered to her own professional growth that she tried to explain this to her colleagues but quickly realized that she might have been over sharing and some of them were resistant and not ready for it (239-242; 249-250).

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[13] Talking about #LINCchat

*"... People are on a continuum... You can only reach them if they have already advanced a little bit. ... Someone is (...) in the **NO** phase (...) [and may] stay there forever. They don't have to change. For [others], (...) even though they might say, 'NO, NO, NO', (...) somehow you still create a bit of the question mark in their head..." (296-301)*

Rene's experiences with her colleagues discouraged her from continuing to share her joy of Twitter with other practitioners, at least when she believed they were not ready for that (288-296). However, if she felt that teachers were ready to embrace Twitter, she would tell them that it was worthwhile spending their time (333-334) and it was such a valuable experience that it was foolish not to take advantage of it (337-338). She would also advise them to start small and focus on their most pressing needs. Whether it was finding a job or implementing new things in own teaching, Rene believed that Twitter might have something for everyone (349-360).

"Try to find some people that whether they have already written books or someone you saw in a workshop and you really liked them, they tweet a lot, and then just follow a few, don't get overwhelmed, you can start very small, and you know, one step at a time and kind of allow yourself to continue and to go there..."
(360-364)

Even though Rene's enthusiasm for spreading her love for professional learning on Twitter among her colleagues faded, she believed that it was her direct responsibility as a teacher to use technology in her classroom. She felt that

without doing that, teachers failed to prepare their learners including adults for real life expectations (378-382; 388-395).

"… Technology is (…) here, it's here to stay, it's getting bigger and bigger and it's not just a tool. … I keep hearing that you have to focus on it as just a tool. No, it's not. It's a lot more than that. It's changing communication. It's changing how people are interacting. New ways of communication and interaction are emerging through technology. (…) Look at us what we are doing and our professional development. And if you do not prepare your students and if not for the real world, what are you doing?" (431-439)

5.6 Conclusion

Rene's experience using Twitter changed her perception from not willing to be in the public eye and connecting with unfamiliar people to valuing those connections and seeing them as a unique opportunity to virtually walk into their classrooms (329-30). Her experience participating in #LINCchat revealed that besides theoretical research there is great value in learning from practical experiences shared by our colleagues.

Chapter 6. Allison's story: Making learning visible

6.1 Introduction

Allison teaches English to newcomers to Canada in a blended program (face-to-face and online) at a community college. She started teaching in 2008 and joined Twitter in December 2011. Allison believes in choice and agency in professional development opportunities. Allison's professional learning exploration takes her from joining Twitter out of curiosity and willingness to try to exercising control over her own PD and making her learning visible.

6.2 The willingness to try

Despite the fact that colleagues at work considered Allison to be a "techno wizard" (19), she had never thought of herself as "a natural technology person" (16-17). Allison joined Twitter out of professional curiosity believing that her willingness to try things online was more important than technological expertise (21-24). In Twitter, she saw the opportunity to share her work and make her learning visible, similar to what teachers ask of their learners on a regular basis (120-122). As Allison believed in agency and choice for her students, she wanted to exercise those in her own professional learning (316-318). She felt that online learning spaces provided her with the ability to self-direct her own learning and, therefore, get the most of it.

"I think that engaging publicly and being willing to take that risk and make a mistake publicly is kind the equivalent of asking our students to show their work." (122-131) "All of the TESL faculty should be active in following blogs,

being on Twitter, seeing what's happening on FB, doing all of these social media

because that's really where people learn." (389-392)

However, going public with own professional learning was not an easy task and it took courage and time. For almost two years her account remained "dormant" (8). When Allison's children moved out, she was left with her technology battle one-on-one. Too many times, she found herself in tears trying to make the technology work for her. It is through trial and error that Allison came to terms with her computer and realized that it "wasn't going to explode if she did something wrong" (160-162). Coming to terms with her technology skills, she decided to revive her Twitter account and started connecting with others online. It was important for Allison to connect with educators who shared interesting content, which she would have determined after carefully screening their tweets. She felt that by following Canadian TESL professionals, especially those who were just starting on Twitter, she provided them with peer support.

"So I don't feel I have to follow everyone back, but I do follow everyone who is Canadian ELT[14]. Especially those people who are starting out because I think they need that support." (36-39)

6.3 Fast and furious PD with Twitter chats

When Allison found out about #LINCchat, she was curious to try, but did not feel that she had the time to spend in a live chat on Twitter. When she first joined, she thought that she would only stay for ten minutes in the beginning of

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[14] Canadian ELT and Canadian TESL are often used interchangeably; one may be preferred over another based on the province.

the #LINCchat hour. Opposite to her intentions, Allison stayed till the end completely immersed in the "fast and furious" exchange of ideas (170-175; 178-182).

" I sometimes join when I have got like a ton of work to do. And I think, ok, I don't really have an hour to give to this, I'm just gonna go in for 10 minutes, say hi, and I just get caught up in it, because the ideas come so fast and furious, and everybody is sharing ideas and responding. (…) It's just really fun and enjoyable way to do PD." (170-183)

Keeping up with the pace of the live chat was a challenge. Allison found herself among other regular #LINCchat-ers spending an extra 15 minutes after the live chat officially ended liking and replying to tweets they might have missed during the conversation (186-189). She also had to learn to communicate her thoughts in a brief and concise way, which she believed was in itself a good exercise.

"… It's almost impossible to keep up, but it is fun. And sometimes I'm a little frustrated by … 140 characters limit of Twitter, but I also find it really liberating because I tend to be somewhat verbose and so (…) I really like the discipline of those 140 characters in Twitter. I found that almost exhilarating to try out to communicate something briefly." (189-197)

Gradually, #LINCchat became an hour that Allison was looking forward to spending with her PLN and tried not to miss any live chats (234). She saw the opportunity to connect with other practitioners outside her teaching context and get to know them better: what their thought processes were, how they

thought about language learning and decide whether or not they were worthwhile following (98-104). Allison found #LINCchat community to be supportive and non-judgemental, something that was not always the case in her face-to-face interactions with her colleagues (251-257). Through #LINCchat sessions, she encountered new ideas that inspired her or validated her existing practices (257-260).

> *"It's become must-have PD. We used to talk about must-watch TV in the old days... You know I couldn't phone my friend Thursday night at 9 o'clock, I knew she would be watching [the next episode of X on] TV. So #LINCchat has kind of become that for me. I moved from the time when I thought I would only give it 10 or 15 minutes. Now, I really plan to stay for the whole hour (...) because I do find it so valuable." (243-251)*

Allison valued *live* interactions (235-240) and enjoyed meeting new people joining #LINCchat community (226-230). Having taught online, Allison knew how important it was to welcome and encourage new people joining #LINCchat and tried to like and reply to the tweets shared by the newer participants to make them feel that they had come to the right place, that their opinions were valued (276-280; 302-303).

> *"When you are new to the whole online world, it's different, it's scary and I think people feel like they are excluded or outsiders. It's like this party that everyone's at and you walk in and you don't know anybody at this party..." (340-343)*

While participating in a learning day held at her workplace, Allison had the opportunity to appreciate the importance of Twitter and Twitter chats in her own professional development. On that day, she felt bored listening to the speakers selected by the administration. Despite the fact that those individuals were excellent presenters and experts in their field, Allison did not feel that "they had anything to say to her" in particular. She thought that she would have had a more productive day had she spent it on Twitter following threads and people who were of relevance to her teaching needs (207-217).

"… I like having the choice. It's just great for me to choose what direction I would like to go with my teaching and then to seek professional learning opportunities that kind of follow that thread there …" (333-337)

6.4 Spreading the joy of Twitter and #LINCchat

Once Allison realized that she was able to learn from her Twitter community a lot more than on her own, she tried to spread her enthusiasm among her colleagues at work. Surprisingly, she found it to be a very challenging task and a "hard sell". She tried to bring up Twitter in her conversations to let her colleagues know that it was a useful tool (75-76). Fellow teachers were skeptical about its value and did not seem to have time for it. She felt that teachers were not aware of "the riches" that were there in Twitter but nevertheless remained hopeful (48-60).

"I would really like to bring more people on side, especially my

work colleagues (…) I do think that if they were introduced to #LINCchat,

they would really love it as much as I do, but the question is how to get

them there. I love the sharing of ideas, the back and forth. I love it when I

type something, someone else is "Yea, I have done that". So it does really go

both ways. I learn from the people and I'm inspired by them and I hope

that people read what I say and feel the same way." (347-356)

Recognizing that Twitter was not for everyone (373-379), Allison strongly believed that connecting online should be the next "big wave of PD" for TESL community. She thought that it was important for teachers who are new to profession to learn how to connect online and ensure that TESL programs introduced trainees to the idea of PLN.

"Let me just say that my online connections (…) have really expanded my

horizons and have given me insights into the field that I might not otherwise have

had (…) I do love books (…) but I also recognize that books are outdated as soon

as they are published. I love the online connections to be able to really be on top of

what's happening and to connect with people who I otherwise wouldn't have …"

(88-98)

Allison's beliefs in the importance of connecting via Twitter were reinforced when a successful external applicant for a teaching position at their college conveyed that she followed Allison on Twitter to stay informed about what was happening in their programs (70-82). Allison realized that, inadvertently, she

might have been mentoring and supporting other practitioners who followed her on Twitter (358-360).

> *" (…) One of the questions they ask people in job interviews is, 'What are you [going to] do to keep up with changes in the field?' And this person they were interviewing said, 'Well I follow a teacher at your school'. (…) That's really (…) me cause I'm the only one on Twitter…" (76-82)*

6.5 Conclusion

Twitter has become a way for Allison to keep up with the fast pace of the teaching profession and take control over her own PD, which she believes is important for every TESL practitioner. Once Allison was able to conquer her fears of technology and being judged by her peers if making a mistake, she has made a big step in her professional growth and her ability to find a supportive online community (153-166). She is delighted with the idea that she might be inadvertently mentoring other practitioners through her Twitter activity (358-360). Recognizing that institutional support is needed for people to take this form of PD seriously (204-205), Allison is passionate about promoting #LINCchat among her colleagues.

Chapter 7. Lilly's story: Connecting with confidence

7.1 Introduction

Lilly teaches English to newcomers to Canada at an evening program offered through a School Board. She started teaching in 2000 and joined Twitter in October 2010. Among other things, she loves using technology in her teaching. Lilly's story describes her pursuit of gaining professional confidence and rediscovering herself while building a PLN on Twitter.

7.2 Help!

When Lilly heard that her daughter's elementary school teacher was using Twitter (9-10), she decided to join this social networking platform without really knowing 'what it was all about' (7) or what she was supposed to do with it (1). She was desperate to find a way to help out her child who was struggling in school. Following her daughter's teacher on Twitter gave Lilly access to teaching resources and other elementary school educators, and more importantly, their insights about elementary education, growth mindset and reading strategies (19-23). This connection also sparked a relationship that transformed into a long lasting friendship (11).

"I saw that my daughters' Grade 3 teacher was on twitter and so I followed her and I made a connection there. (…) I noticed because I followed along with her tweets that year my daughter really blossomed." (9-14)

7.3 This meeting is for teachers only!

Throughout her teaching career and despite her outstanding work ethics, Lilly had never had confidence in herself. Being a visible minority, Lilly was often mistaken for an ESL student in her class (163-168) and frequently asked where the teacher was or even more so why the class did not have a teacher (175-177). Once, at a staff meeting she was told that she did not belong there since the meeting was for teachers only (171-173). It got to the point where she felt upset and frustrated with herself for not being able to say a word in the staff room around other teachers (195-205).

"That shattered my confidence (…) I guess my personality had something to do with that. One of the things that I guess hindered me in my career for many (…) years." (181-184)

Lilly wanted to overcome the fear that hindered her from participating in teaching conversations and advancing in her career. She remembered how useful Twitter had been in her ability to support her daughter at school and decided to use the network for her own professional growth.

" In my personal life Twitter made an impact (…) and that what probably (…) made me continue with pursuing Twitter in my professional life." (15-17)

Lilly noticed that other people used hashtags in their tweets and started looking into them. Thus, Lilly discovered #eltchat and followed a few educators related to it (22). While lurking on a live #eltchat, she was tempted to dip her toes into

it. She tried to participate once or twice but found it very difficult to keep up with others (43-44).

"So the first time I lurked (…) I was scared because (…) all these people were answering so quickly. (…) My head was spinning from how fast the questions and answers seem to be happening. And I thought, 'How could I ever participate?' (…) My mind didn't work so quickly. By the time (…) I constructed an answer, they have gone on the third question and I didn't see the point of answering then. I didn't know if I should answer. Would I be disrupting the flow of the question and answer?" (34-43).

Lilly checked out a few #eltchat participant profiles and discovered that some of them used blogging to share their teaching practices and reflections. Lilly thought those blogs were "magnificent" (59-62). She was very excited to find out that one of them was from her native Canada. After some time closely following that teacher's blog, she 'got the nerve' to post a little comment online, in which she thanked the blogger for sharing her expertise. A few years later, Lilly ran into that very teacher blogger at a local conference and introduced herself. Lilly, who at that time did not really believe that she had anything valuable to say to other teachers, was profoundly touched by the humanity of that encounter and decided to try harder to build her professional connections (75-79).

"And then I met [her] at a conference (…) When I first saw [her, she was] like a movie star <laughter>. I ran out to [her]. (…) I said, 'Oh, I follow you on Twitter' <laughter>. (…) [She was] actually really nice about it. (…) [She was] just

as nice in person. So, at that point, I thought (…) maybe I could take a risk and start making real connections (…). Maybe I could participate (…). After all, I got (…) so much from following other people from my PLN that maybe I actually could do my part and contribute." (81-94)

7.4 A Twitter chat close to home

Lilly was overjoyed when she heard the news that a special Twitter chat for Canadian LINC practitioners was launching (278-280). For a very long time, Lilly had been looking for a chat that would be close to home and directly related to her teaching context (280-283). Even though she hardly knew anything about it, Lilly had a strong feeling that she would relate to people participating in #LINCchat and was looking forward to it (286-287). However, due to her class schedule, she was not able to join a live session. Twice a month when a live #LINCchat took place, she rushed home after class dying to see who participated, how it went and what it was about (291-295).

"… I rushed home, I went on Twitter and I checked out the chat and I thought this is exactly what I imagined it would be. It was the safe space, there was no judgment…" (295-297)

As Lilly was reading through the #LINCchat thread after the fact, she felt the urge to respond and participate. She imagined herself in the lunchroom with other colleagues and she wanted to let them know what she thought and say "YES" to the things she agreed with (316-320). Being a night school instructor, Lilly found it hard to find time to converse with her colleagues after class. She found her refuge in the #LINCchat 'staffroom' (330-336).

"...My thing was to go home and check #LINCchat right away on Tuesday nights. ... It helped... something to look forward to. And when I had a bad class, I knew I could go home and read through the tweets and feel better because I felt like that was my community..." (326-30)

When Lilly finally joined her first live #LINCchat she was equipped with the growth mindset and ready to be pushed out of her comfort zone (268-269). She was surprised at how fast #LINCchat moved and even more surprised that she was able to move as fast (337-341). Next day, Lilly was so excited that she told everyone at her school about her experience and encouraged everybody to join #LINCchat (299-304).

"... It really pushes you out of your comfort zone if you want it to, but it can also be a safe place. (...) Whereas I was very unsuccessful in participating in chats before #LINCchat, I came at a time when I guess I was ready for that... My confidence was higher but also because it was relevant to my own teaching context..." (269-275)

Even though most of the time Lilly's participation was asynchronous, #LINCchat has become her "safe space" to share teaching ideas, frustrations and joys, what she was doing in class and ask for help from fellow teachers (345-347). In contrast to face-to-face workshops, especially if arranged by the administration for the entire staff and not directly related to her immediate teaching needs (415-417), Lilly found that Twitter offered her a fluid space

(260-264) to connect with timely professional learning opportunities (398-400).

"… Information is changing so quickly. If I wait for face-to-face opportunities, by the time I go to the face-to-face opportunities, I might already be behind." (406-408)

One day, an expert in the field, had posted a positive reply to one of her #LINCchat tweets. Lilly felt that a reply from someone she highly respected in her profession validated her teaching practices and thus her confidence grew tenfold (378-385).

7.5 Conclusion

Lilly's urgent need to gain professional confidence in teaching led her to seeking out a PLN on Twitter (255-256). Through continuing interactions and positive encounters with her PLN, she was able to overcome her fears and became a more proactive contributor to her local teaching community (187-188). In #LINCchat, Lilly found a supportive community where she belonged (297-299).

Chapter 8. Discussion

8.1 Introduction

One of the ideas that intrigued me in the literature review was that the user-generated, networked learning (Swanson, 2013; Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013) "is a mindset more than anything else" and that educators engaged in these activities adopt certain principles that differentiate their thinking and learning (Whitaker et al., 2015: xxiii). In this chapter, I have summarized a few observations made in the process of reconstructing individual stories that may be of relevance to the change in mindset ideas expressed in the literature (Whitaker et al., 2015; Couros, 2015).

8.2 The use of language

When describing their participation in #LINCchat or relationships with their Twitter PLN, practitioners used language and metaphors associated with real rather than virtual face-to-face interactions. Dori compared her participation in #LINCchat as "sitting and talking in a coffee shop with a bunch of friends" (Dori, 233). She also felt that she was "screamed at" while lurking on a Twitter chat but not tweeting herself (Dori, 326). When talking about the advantages of being connected with other teachers online, Rene compared it to "walking in someone else's classroom" (Rene, 330); she described her participation in LINCchat as if "seeing familiar faces" (Rene, 519). Allison thought that it was good for her to "hear when/what people say" in #LINCchat meaning to see what they wrote in their tweets (Allison, 224). Lilly compared #LINCchat to

taking part in a lunchroom conversation with other teachers (Lilly, 317-18). These observations resonate with the ideas that interactions among educators connected on Twitter are governed by the relational principles of a real-life professional setting and may result in strong personal connections (Whitaker et al., 2015: 88; Weston, 2015, para. 5).

"Interacting with PLN members in a largely 'virtual' manner may seem, at first, to be an impersonal way of interacting, growing, and learning. Nothing could be further from the truth." (Whitaker et al., 2015: 88)

Interestingly, #LINCchat was referred to as a "safe" place to interact (Lilly, 345) despite the fact that all Twitter chat interactions are public and can be viewed by thousands of people belonging to the invisible audience (Megele, 2014: 47). Apparently, the research participants developed a strong feeling of belonging to the #LINCchat community and felt safe expressing their opinions with its core group. Their ability to overcome the initial intimidation of being in the public eye (Allison, 270; Rene, 478-79) is indicative of a major mindset transformation that the four TESL practitioners engaged in #LINCchat were willing to make for the benefit of their professional learning (Whitaker et al., 2015: 6, 36).

The words "wonderful" (Lilly, 72), "worthwhile" (Dori, 245), "excellent" (Rene, 257) and "riches" (Allison, 58) were used to refer to the resources shared by the PLN indicating that teachers tend to trust the quality and make an effort to check out the resources filtered for them by their PLN (Swanson, 2013: 23).

Whether teachers make use of the resources shared by their Twitter PLN, how they go about evaluating them and how that affects their practices may be an interesting topic for further investigation.

8.3 Professional isolation

The theme of professional isolation, eloquently described in the works of Whitaker et al. (2015) and Weston (2015), emerged when practitioners talked about their engagement in #LINCchat. Dori was determined to introduce her colleagues to #LINCchat and thought it would be beneficial to them as they all worked in isolation, from home in an online program (Dori, 131). Rene said that "teaching is most of the time lonely" and there weren't many opportunities to chat face-to-face and therefore she felt that #LINCchat had become a support group for her (Rene, 520). Being a night school instructor, Lilly often found herself alone and did not have anyone to talk to so #LINCchat had become a refuge for her and she felt as if surrounded by colleagues while reading through it (Lilly, 333-35). It is possible that the impact that the #LINCchat PLN has had on the four participants was amplified by their previous feelings of disconnection in their workplaces (Weston, 2015, para. 6). The exhilaration of reconnecting (Weston, 2015, para. 6) with a PLN of like-minded practitioners motivated them to share their enthusiasm with colleagues in their work setting, another theme that has been voiced by all four participants and discussed below.

8.4 Spreading enthusiasm for Twitter

All four teachers, whether successfully or not, tried to share their positive experiences of professional learning and networking on Twitter with their colleagues. Dori volunteered to mentor teaching staff in her workplace hoping to get them on #LINCchat (Dori, 305-308). Allison tried to bring up Twitter in every conversation with her colleagues to get them interested (Allison, 75-76). Rene used to talk about Twitter during lunchroom conversations, but decided to stop since she felt that others might not be interested or ready for that (Rene, 270-71). After the first #LINCchat, Lilly was so excited that she tried to entice to participate every teacher at her school and the school she was subbing (Lilly, 299-301). They all agreed that encouraging others to join them on Twitter was a "hard sell" (Allison, 60) and suggested that the institutional support and recognition (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013; Couros, 2015; Langhorst, 2015; Ross et al., 2015) may have been helpful to get their colleagues on board (Rene, 252-254) and should include introducing PLN to teachers as early as their initial TESL training (Dori, 76-77; Allison, 389-392).

8.4 Modeling learning

All four teachers made references to their learners when talking about their professional learning on Twitter. Dori saw introducing online tools to fellow teachers as the opportunity to make them more autonomous in their professional learning similar to what "teachers do with their students" (Dori, 315). Lilly thought it was only fair to expect from learners to engage in learning

opportunities outside of class if teachers themselves practiced and demonstrated continuing professional learning (Lilly, 409-412) and teachers as learners must be in control of their PD (Lilly, 452-53). For Allison, making her learning and mistakes visible via Twitter and #LINCchat was similar to what teachers expected of their learners on a daily basis (Allison, 124-25). Rene was convinced that it is a teachers direct responsibility to learn how to use online tools and implement them in teaching in order to be able to meet learners' needs in today's realities (Rene, 390-392).

Whitaker et al. (2015: 97-110) and Couros (2015: 58-59) emphasize the importance of "modeling the way" (Whitaker et al., 2015: 97) to our learners and fellow practitioners, which is another distinguishing trait of a practitioner mindset that is nurturing a culture of collaboration (Whitaker et al., 2015: 98), professional growth, leadership and innovation. Whether the use of Twitter for professional learning and networking contributes to developing leadership among practitioners and whether practitioners using Twitter for their professional learning and networking are being perceived as such by others may inspire further research.

8.6 Summary

While the purpose of this research study was to tell the stories, the observations that emerged in the process of telling should be used as a springboard to further research related to teacher engagement in professional learning and networking using Twitter and Twitter chats.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

Professional learning and networking stories in this study should be of value to practitioners interested in ways to diversify their professional learning and development through Twitter as well as administrators considering new opportunities for their staff. I hope that other TESL practitioners engaged in professional learning and networking on Twitter may be inspired to tell their own stories and contribute to the existing narrative. Below, I will reflect on some ideas that emerged in the process of retelling practitioner stories while answering the principal question, *"What stories do Canadian TESL practitioners engaged in #LINCchat tell about their professional learning and networking?"*

Each story in this research study described one of many professional learning and networking explorations on Twitter recognizing that each experience is unique and meaningful in its uniqueness (Josselson, 2013: xi). For all four practitioners, Twitter at first was a new territory, which they approached in light of their individual predispositions, preferences and needs. While they were exploring some new ways to complement their existing practices with Twitter, it became an important part of their professional lives. Dori has established a "community of friends and colleagues across the country" (Dori, 50-53); Rene has found a new way of and medium for learning; Allison has conquered her fears of technology and found a way to keep up with the fast

pace of her field; and Lilly rediscovered her confidence while reimagining her teaching self through a supportive community to which she felt she belonged.

The four stories have echoed the idea that professional learning and networking through Twitter is yet to be recognized among fellow practitioners (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013). All four practitioners noted that their efforts to share their enthusiasm for Twitter were received with some reluctance among colleagues. However, more importantly is that these intentions to share positive experiences and practices may suggest some form of leadership they started to manifest. What this means for each of them and their programs requires further consideration and investigation.

The idea of teachers using Twitter to model continuing learning outside of class to their learners as well as what effect it has on learners and learner success is another area that should be considered in future research. User-generated, networked learning on Twitter and trough Twitter chats described in this research study is gaining weight among professionals in education (Swanson, 2013; Skyring, 2015; Whitaker, 2015; Wesely, n.d; Weston, 2015, Carpenter & Krutka, 2015) and its effect on teacher and student growth and success (Whitaker et al, 2015; Couros, 2015; Wesely, n.d.) needs to be documented and researched in order to be given appropriate credit and recognition by teacher training and professional development institutions (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013).

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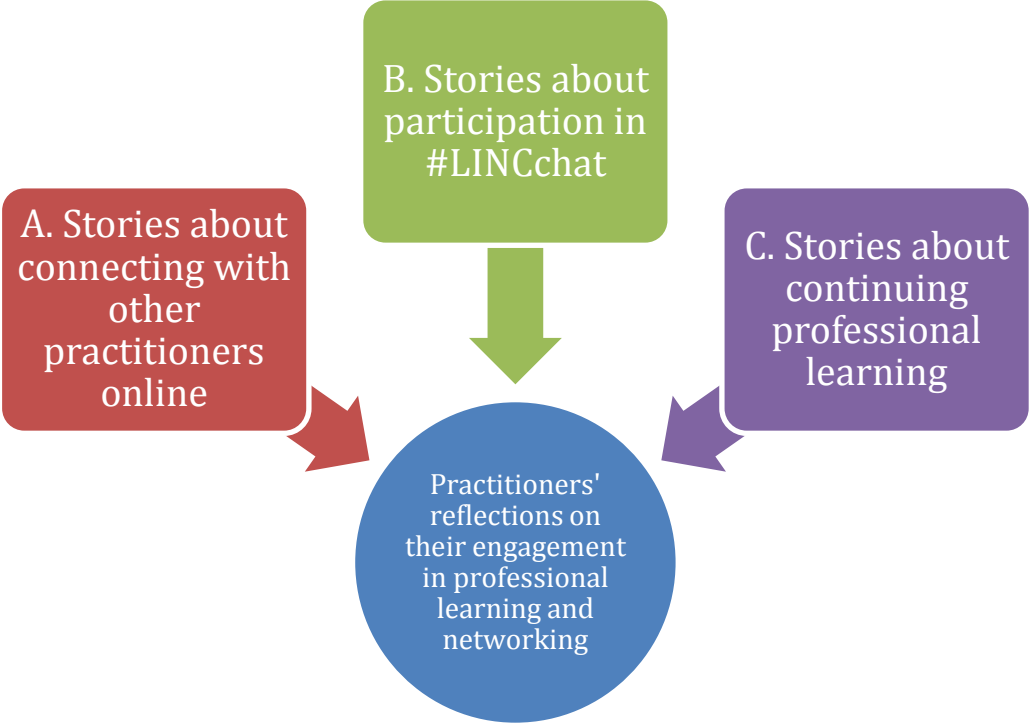Bathmaker, A., & Harnett, P. (2010). *Exploring Learning, Identity and Power through Life History and Narrative Research*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

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Appendix 1. Planning the interview.

1.1 Scope of the interview

A. Stories about connecting with other practitioners online

B. Stories about participation in #LINCchat

C. Stories about continuing professional learning

Practitioners' reflections on their engagement in professional learning and networking

1.2 Interview questions

For my final MA dissertation project, I'm collecting professional learning and networking stories of Canadian TESL practitioners. I believe these stories are worth sharing and could be an important tool to educate other members of the TESL community. I have known you as a connected TESL practitioner actively involved in online professional learning and networking and regularly participating in #LINCchat. I would like to ask you to share your story or stories of being a connected practitioner, creating your PLN, and participating in #LINCchat. There aren't any right or wrong answers: your personal experiences and recollections of events are key.

A. Stories about connecting with other practitioners online

A1. Think about the time when you were just starting to connect with others online. What do you remember?

- *How did you feel?*

- *Do you recall any stressful or exciting moments?*

- *Who did you connect with? Why?*

A2. What have you learned about PLN from your experiences?

- *If you were talking to a practitioner who hasn't been engaged in PLN online, what would you like to share with them?*

A3. How would you say your PLN have influenced you or your professional learning?

- *How are you now different as to whom you were before engaging in online professional learning networks?*

B. Stories about participation in #LINCchat

B1. Tell me about your participation in #LINCchat. Could you remember a moment of joy or a moment of frustration?

B2. If there was one thing you would say about your engagement in #LINCchat, what would it be?

B3. How would you describe relationships among #LINCchat participants? Has anything surprised, annoyed, or maybe inspired you?

C. Stories about continuing professional learning

C1. What is continuing professional learning for you?

- *What works for you? What do you value?*

- *What does it mean to personalize your professional learning?*

- *What role do you attribute yourself?*

C2. What role does your participation in #LINCchat have in your continuing professional learning?

C3. What role do you have in your PLN and #LINCchat?

Appendix 2. My story

2.1 What drew you to this question?

Since the #LINCchat started, I have been fascinated with the professional learning and networking opportunities through Twitter chats. I think that those practitioners who have successfully incorporated PLN and Twitter chats in their professional learning should share their stories to inspire and educate their colleagues. I personally have found a community that I associate myself with and am eager to contribute to as well as an event (#LINCchat) that I look forward to twice a month.

2.2 What are your assumptions and preconceptions about the

phenomena?

A few months ago I conducted a pilot study with one #LINCchat participant who was not able to attend live sessions and interacted with the #LINCchat summaries after the fact. Based on my findings and own experience, I think that engagement in PLN on Twitter and participation in #LINCchat have a significant impact in practitioners' professional learning, practice and even confidence.

2.3 What in your own life experience are you bringing to the study?

My connection with the "world" started in 2012 when I set up a Twitter account and started following individuals in my areas of interest (e.g., teaching, TESL, educational technology). In the beginning, I often had nothing to say or was terrified to say something that may sound ridiculous or unimportant.

Twitter chats (at that time #edchat and #ELTchat) were extremely appealing, but nevertheless terrifying. Each time I tried to reply to someone in 140 characters, it would take me such a long time to think it through that by the time I was certain what I wanted to tweet, it would be no longer relevant.

The first few months on Twitter was so called my "honey moon period": a time of my fascination with the network of connected educators, my desire to be one of them, to be noticed and contribute. During that time I observed and followed; it was all about the resources, checking out the links, thinking of what I had to contribute to our field and all of my interactions were mainly asynchronous. Then, followed a period of me establishing myself, starting a blog, using Twitter to post some content, anxiously waiting for someone to like and re-tweet it. After establishing a bit of online presence and developing a PLN on Twitter, I have rediscovered face-to-face conferences where I could meet some of my Twitter connection in real life.

In September 2015, when I started co-moderating #LINCchat a new stage of engagement began for me. Now, I learn through exchange of ideas that are born in our interactions during #LINCchat live discussions. I still like the links (resources), but benefit a lot more from ideas that are easy to remember and apply directly. I rarely have time to go and explore all those links. However, I learn a lot from my colleagues sharing what and how they work with their students. I grab their ideas and able to implement them instantly in my teacher training

practice. I feel that I am able to shape my own learning and am proactively contributing to my own advancement and development of Canadian TESL community.

2.4 How do you expect to feel about the people you will talk to?

I am very interested in their stories. My interactions with three of the participants have ben limited to our online activity on Twitter including #LINCchat. I'm very curious to talk to them in a different way. I have had an interview with one participant before for the pilot project. When the pilot project was finished, I shared my work with that participant. I hope that we have established trust in our relationship, which may contribute to the depth of our interview.

2.5 How do you expect them to feel toward you?

From what I have seen and heard so far, I think that I won't be a stranger to them since I have interacted with them on Twitter. Based on their willingness to participate in the research, I expect them to be enthusiastic about the subject matter.

Appendix 3. Using memos in data analysis

3.1 A screenshot of Dori's interview transcript with memos

LINC Instructor Dori Interview Transcript

A   B   C

Lines	Transcript	Memos
1	A1.	
2-25	46 s Um... *Well, I remember being not wanting to do it Ha-ha-ha... I remember thinking Oh, God this is one more thing I have to do. I'm already pretty busy; I do not need this... I have plenty of people here that I know.* Um... but I attended you know webinars all the time – that was my job – so you know all that PD as a moderator would seep in my head I guess and seemed like a bit of the community and I thought OK I need to maybe for my job, you know promote things on Tutela, Tutela webinars and get on LinkedIn and get on Tutela. It was all self directed. I wasn't told I had to do it, sort of grudgingly did it though. 1:43 *I felt overwhelmed, I felt it was impersonal, I felt I had already had too many things to do. There was this one thing I had to learn, it did not come – none of it came naturally... Maybe because I sort of missed that – even at university we did not have the internet or cell-phones or anything. It felt like I was older than everybody else* ☺ But you know little by little and I'm still figuring things out even on #LINCchat like What? I see people answering questions Didn't I see that question? And I have to do it on my laptop I can not do it on my phone – it is too small, I need my glasses it is I have got big fingers... I do not know Ha-ha-ha It's hard! 02:27-02:34 *So I just you know forced myself. I thought OK I do not want to be left behind I need to get on board.*	• Connecting online perceived as an imposition, burden, and another thing on the professional plate. • Decision to start connecting for "my job", did it grudgingly, had to learn, none of it came naturally; had to learn little by little. • Twitter in the beginning was overwhelming. • Got to know people online. Feels like she has a community of colleagues across Canada that supports her. • It feels like you know the people you are connected online with • 2 year time line • People started approaching her at conferences • Knowing her face
27-42	Twitter in the beginning it just seemed like it was so fast and there was so much going on, so I tried to focus on people in ESL that I saw regularly and I think one of the first people I noticed was Nathan Hall. He posted a lot, very visual and it had links to his website, and I heard his name at conferences I never met him so I started reading his blog and you know he was funny and he had pictures so it was sort of easy to read and you know I learned some things from him, from his blog and I thought Oh I'll try that out and try this out and finally I was at BC TEAL last year and I introduced myself to him and I just went from there I feel like now I have met a lot of the people that I have met on Twitter and of course I have met them in webinars, I have seen them on LinkedIn, and *I sort of feel that I know them now. It's kind of funny that I do...* (03:43) You know and you meet them at conferences – I'm lucky that I get to go to a lot of conferences and I reach out and	

42 lines out of 362

3.2 Using memos to draft a rough outline for each part of the story

❖ **Identifying a metaphor/theme**

Dori's story: mastering a new skill

❖ **Connecting beginning to an end**

Dori's story exemplifies an educator's transition from reluctance to use social media to finding value in online learning and connectivity.

❖ **Each story is based on three questions**

a) What was its starting point?

b) What happened along the way?

c) What was the destination?

❖ **Drafting an outline**

a) *What was Dori's starting point?*

- *Connecting online perceived as an imposition, burden, and another thing on the professional plate.*

- *Decision to start connecting for "my job", did it grudgingly, had to learn, none of it came naturally; had to learn little by little.*

- *Twitter in the beginning was overwhelming.*

- *Getting comfortable, getting over the hump*

- *Connecting with more people in contrast to conferences*

Appendix 4. Data analysis and the writing process

Step 1: Transcribing, preliminary highlighting what seemed to be of importance

(column B), recording a personal memo (column C)

A Lines	B Transcript	C Memos
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29	A1. 46 s Um… *Well, I remember being not wanting to do it Ha-ha-ha… I remember thinking Oh, God this is one more thing I have to do. I'm already pretty busy; I do not need this… I have plenty of people here that I know.* Um… but I attended you know webinars all the time – that was my job – so you know all that PD as a moderator would seep in my head I guess and seemed like a bit of the community and I thought OK I need to maybe for my job, you know promote things on Tutela, Tutela webinars and get on LinkedIn and get on Tutela. It was all self directed. I wasn't told I had to do it, sort of grudgingly did it though. (1:43) I felt overwhelmed, I felt it was impersonal, I felt I had already had too many things to do. There was this one thing I had to learn, it did not come – none of it came naturally… Maybe because I sort of missed that – even at university we did not have the internet or cell-phones or anything. It felt like I was older than everybody else ☺ But you know little by little and I'm still figuring things out even on #LINCchat like What? I see people answering questions Didn't I see that question? And I have to do it on my laptop I can not do it on my phone – it is too small, I need my glasses it is I have got big fingers… I do not know Ha-ha-ha It's hard! 02:27-02:34 *So I just you know forced myself. I thought OK I do not want to be left behind I need to get on board.* Twitter in the beginning it just seemed like it was so fast and there was so much going on, so I tried to focus on people in ESL that I saw regularly…	• Connecting online perceived as an imposition, burden, and another thing on her professional plate.

Step 2: Reading and reflecting on the passage, identifying other "flashpoints",

adding more memos

A Lines	B Transcript	C Memos
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29	Q. A1 46 s Um... ***Well, I remember being not wanting to do it Ha-ha-ha... I remember thinking Oh, God this is one more thing I have to do. I'm already pretty busy; I do not need this... I have plenty of people here that I know.*** Um... but I attended you know webinars all the time – that was my job – so you know all that PD as a moderator would seep in my head I guess and seemed like a bit of the community and I thought OK I need to maybe for my job, you know promote things on Tutela, Tutela webinars and get on LinkedIn and get on Tutela. It was all self directed. I wasn't told I had to do it, sort of grudgingly did it though. 1:43 ***I felt overwhelmed, I felt it was impersonal, I felt I had already had too many things to do. There was this one thing I had to learn, it did not come – none of it came naturally... Maybe because I sort of missed that – even at university we did not have the internet or cell-phones or anything. It felt like I was older than everybody else*** ☺ But you know little by little and I'm still figuring things out even on #LINCchat like What? I see people answering questions Didn't I see that question? And I have to do it on my laptop I can not do it on my phone – it is too small, I need my glasses it is I have got big fingers... I do not know Ha-ha-ha It's hard! 02:27-02:34 ***So I just you know forced myself. I thought OK I do not want to be left behind I need to get on board.*** Twitter in the beginning it just seemed like it was so fast and there was so much going on, so I tried to focus on people in ESL that I saw regularly...	• Connecting online perceived as an imposition, burden, and another thing on her professional plate. • Decision to start connecting for "my job", did it grudgingly, had to learn, none of it came naturally; had to learn little by little. • Twitter in the beginning was overwhelming.

Step 3: Re-reading and scrutinizing the events around the highlighted points, reconstructing transcript into a narrative form, creating the first narrative sketch

Draft 1

Although Dori quickly understood the value of connecting via social media and developing an online presence in her professional activity, she perceived it as an imposition, a burden or one more new skill she needed to master (2-8). She joined Twitter out of necessity to promote her programs among the members of the online Canadian TESL community (8-10) but also being afraid that she somehow would be "left behind" if not becoming a part of it (24). It was her personal decision to "get on board" and learn how to use Twitter (25).

"I remember (...) not wanting to do it. Ha-ha-ha. I remember thinking (...) this is one more thing I have to do. I'm already pretty busy. I do not need this (...) I have plenty of people here that I know." (2-5)

Step 4: Re-listening, reflecting on the memos, revisiting the first draft, re-writing

Draft 2

Although Dori recognized that it was important in her new role to be able to connect with fellow practitioners and develop a professional presence on social media, she perceived it as an imposition, a burden or one more skill to master (2-12). Grudgingly, she decided to "get on board" and learn how to use Twitter out of necessity to promote her new program's services, but also out of worry that she might be "left behind" if not trying it out (23-25).

"I remember (…) not wanting to do it (…) I remember thinking (…) this is one more thing I have to do. I'm already pretty busy. I do not need this (…) I have plenty of people here that I know." (2-5)

In the beginning, Dori found Twitter overwhelming and too fast for her. Trying to manage and process relevant information, Dori limited her connections to TESL professionals whose work she knew or whom she might have met in person at a conference or a workshop (27-29).

"I felt overwhelmed. I felt it was impersonal. (…) None of it came naturally. (…) It felt like I was older than everybody else…" (12-18)

Step 5: Repeating the process for each highlighted point and creating narrative sketches.

Step 6: Sequencing narrative sketches (❖) to tell the story

Draft 3

4.2 Getting social online

❖ Although Dori recognized that it was important in her new role to be able to connect with fellow practitioners and develop a professional presence on social media, she perceived it as an imposition, a burden or one more skill to master (2-12). Grudgingly, she decided to "get on board" and learn how to use Twitter out of necessity to promote her new program's services, but also out of worry that she might be "left behind" if not trying it out (23-25).

"I remember (…) not wanting to do it (…) I remember thinking (…) this is one more thing I have to do. I'm already pretty busy. I do not need this (…) I have plenty of people here that I know." (2-5)

❖ In the beginning, Dori found Twitter overwhelming and too fast for her. Trying to manage and process relevant information, Dori limited her connections to TESL professionals whose work she knew or whom she might have met in person at a conference or a workshop (27-29).

> *"I felt overwhelmed. I felt it was impersonal. (…) None of it came naturally. (…) It felt like I was older than everybody else…"* (12-18)

- ❖ When she felt more comfortable navigating Twitter streams, Dori started expanding her connections. She liked that she was able to learn about an individual's teaching context and interests in a matter of seconds by clicking on their profiles and used that information to decide whether to continue or not their professional conversation. Dori found it to be extremely easy to connect with like-minded practitioners on Twitter in contrast to face-to-face conferences where it was impossible 'to get that much information about each other from that many people' (98-102).

> *"Face to face you can not click on their forehead and find out … it takes time and (…) you have to make that emphasis to ask those questions and pull it out of them. I don't know I just feel like once you are there and you find the right chat or forum for you, it's easier and faster and (…) I feel that you have that community built quicker than you would have face-to-face."* (120-128)

Step 7: Final revision and editing (See 4.2).