

Leveraging Social Media and Scholarly Discussion for Educator Empowerment

Authors:

Steven Kolber
Brunswick Secondary College

Sandy Nicoll
Excelsia College, Australia

Kelli McGraw
Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Nicolas Gaube
Collège René Cassin, France

Keith R. Heggart
University of Technology Sydney

Keywords:

Social media, professional learning, professional development, Twitter

Abstract

This paper shares insights from an international community of educators who have been using social media as a virtual space for a scholarly reading group: #edureading. The collection of educator narratives presented in this paper show how social networks on Twitter and Flipgrid were used as inclusive environments for teacher-led professional development. This paper is both a report of research involving five practitioners inquiring into their collective experience, and an exercise in building the scholarly capacity of the #edureading group. The accessibility of the social media platforms, as well as the collaborative, inquiry-based approach to scholarly reading, emerge as key themes in the educator narratives. The findings of this research emphasise that professional learning occurring in virtual spaces is open to social mediation using the norms of social networks, rather than the norms of workplaces, jurisdictions or education sectors, and that this can lead to a greater sense of empowerment for educators.

1. Introduction

The #edureading community (established in 2018 on Twitter) positions teachers as both consumers and producers of educational research, promoting discussions about the profession of teaching between teachers and their socially networked colleagues. In doing so, teachers are able to speak back to academic research in dialogue with fellow teachers, supporting each other and early career teachers to comprehend, analyse and apply research. The wide-ranging population of the #edureading community allows teachers to access a greater diversity of voices

and avoid becoming trapped in the silos of schools or sectors. Participation in the network and research discussion provides potential invigoration for the profession of teaching. This paper profiles four narratives from founding members of the #edureading community, three from Australia and one from France. To contextualise these narratives, the professional development cultures of France and Australia are also discussed and ways that social media mediated groups such as this carry different meanings and relevance to the teachers of these two nations are examined.

2. #edureading: Group design

The group being discussed, #edureading, brings together its members, and the broader audience of Twitter, around a monthly theme exercised through a close reading of a single research paper. The core activity of the group is reading this article and responding to three prompts, tailored to the article under discussion, via the online video sharing platform of FlipGrid. This sits alongside ongoing private-message discussion among the group using Twitter, that throughout the month typically involves supporting one another in their work, bringing relevant examples, articles and tweets to the groups' attention and so forth. These discussions culminate in a live Twitter 'chat' on the last Sunday of the month, that draws upon the ideas that have emerged from the previously outlined response options.

As the group has continued over the years, additional chats have taken place on Twitter 'Spaces', that allows live audio discussions to be held by the group during the middle of the month, as well as on Clubhouse when this application became popular. Prior to this the discussion also took place for many months in written format using a shared annotation document on Kami, allowing for an ongoing, text-based digital annotation where ideas were shared and commentary made upon other member's notes. This shows the manner in which the group spans social media spaces (Twitter and Clubhouse), as well as more traditional online learning platforms and tools (FlipGrid and Kami).

The #edureading group is an international project, and has members from nations beyond Australia. The group was created and continues to be led by an Australian teacher, as a way of fostering teacherly discussions about research that respond to concerns about education in a global context. It is a difficult time to be a teacher, in Australia and globally. Already dealing with increasing, and some would say onerous, levels of accountability and a media that rarely recognises the value of teachers, many teachers in Australia are now being required to return to work despite the ever-present threat of COVID-19. In addition, teachers are also regularly derided by politicians (Sharma, 2018). This criticism is often linked to claims about Australia's declining grades in international testing, like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), to construct a narrative that Australia's education system, and especially the teachers working within it, are failures.

The most common policy response is a call for more, or higher quality, professional development (PD) for teachers, so that they are better prepared to teach students. In many Australian jurisdictions, this PD is now linked to maintenance of teacher registration/

accreditation (the terminology varies from state to state). This view of PD presents it as a simplistic panacea and is strongly linked to the commercialism of education systems (Hogan & Lingard, 2019). Yet the provision of PD for teachers is hardly new. One must ask: if that is the solution, why has it failed to deliver improvements in the past - and why should we expect it to do so now? The answer to that question - and some of the other challenges facing educators - may be to do with the locus of power in these initiatives.

Too many PD offerings are top-down; that is, they are done for/to teachers, created by organisations such as professional bodies and schools, rather than created by or with them. Such an approach limits the utility of these initiatives. Into this lacuna we seek to share perspectives on a different approach: PD run entirely by teachers, with a global reach, through the mechanism of social media. This paper reports and explores our experiences with such an approach, the #edureading group. Although it is excessive to say that #edureading alone can change public and political perceptions of teachers, it is not incorrect to state that it provides a model of a form of PD that empowers teachers to change their perceptions of themselves, by sharpening their critical, discursive and relational professional skills (Zappavigna, 2018).

3. The failures of traditional PD

Teaching is a complex endeavour (Beckett & Hager, 2018; Kurtz & Snowden, 2003). Meeting the PD needs of teachers is equally challenging; within any one staffroom, there is a bewildering array of knowledge and experience. Despite this diversity, PD for many teachers remains largely the same: it is uniform, lacking any tailoring towards specific professional needs of individual teachers. It is often a 'one-off' affair where a consultant presents a neatly packaged offering and disappears before any follow-up. It is hardly surprising that much of the literature on PD shows almost without fail how ineffective it is (Cohen & Hill, 1998; 2001; Curwood & Biddolph, 2017; Wiliam, 2016; Netolicky, 2020).

The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2012) approach to PD is also limited in many respects. Netolicky (2020) argues that AITSL's framework promotes a traditional, facilitator-led model of PD. This feeds into an increasingly managerial discourse within education; that is, teachers need to be 'managed' by an ever-increasing army of experts, consultants and the ubiquitous teacher-educators. In this case, PD becomes less about improving the quality of teaching and learning, and more about ensuring compliance, accountability and control (Mockler, 2020).

The situation is similar in France, where teachers' PD is underserved and largely top-down (Mons et al., 2021, p2). A mix of certified and non certified teacher trainers work together to set up a teacher training catalog, but as this is designed by their administration it does not cover the PD needs of all teachers. Moreover, teachers still have to ask for permission to attend a PD session and even then they may well be denied by their administration. This highly endogenous in-service training model has limited attractiveness and leads to staff searching for training opportunities outside the Ministry (Mons et al., 2021, p3).

As with Australia, the focus on one-shot PD without support or follow-up has led to an approach that lacks relevance and does not translate well into the classroom. In France, teachers are increasingly looking towards using social media and self-organising to meet their professional development needs (Bourdoncle & Lumbroso, 2018; Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017), and these forms are noted as the most impactful learning for educators from both nations in the narratives below.

French “teachers lack quality training and, aware of these shortcomings, demand more open access to new learning.” (Mons et al., 2021, p.3). An example of French use of social media is the #educattentats hashtag, which sprung out of the need for teachers to grapple with the 2015 terrorist attacks. It represents an example of ‘just-in-time’ PD (Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017) that was highly active, then disappeared 28 days later. This displays the strength and flexibility of this informal type of learning, which stands in contrast to traditional PD available ‘on the ground’.

Throughout history, teachers have become “objects of intervention” through growing teacher and school accountability practices, standardised testing, new curricular areas, decentralisation and privatisation (Bascia & Stevenson, 2017, p. 5). This has resulted in a system of “professionalism from above” rather than “professionalism from within” (Evetts, 2011) within a culture of “New Public Management” (NPM) (Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020). Too often the teaching profession is spoken on behalf of and belittled, either through press releases, social media posts, policy dictats and also in some examples of research. In 2001, Sachs suggested that “If the teaching profession wants to be the author of its own identity or professional narrative then now is possibly the time for this to occur” (p. 15). Nearly 20 years on, this is yet to be realised but the generation of teacher-led PD is a hopeful signal. Hargreaves (2000) noted that “many teachers are starting to turn more to each other for professional learning” (p. 162). 20 years after the advice of Sachs and observations of Hargreaves, Netolicky (2020) describes how “teachers are taking back their own learning through blogging, Twitter, and TeachMeets” (p.123). This continual striving and goal of teacher-led and open professional learning is realised in the #edureading group.

Digital and mobile technologies, and especially social media, allow teachers to ever more effectively direct their PD, in ways that previously were difficult. Central to this idea is the rise of professional learning networks (PLNs) (Goodyear et al., 2019) and professional learning communities (PLCs) (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018), and the affordances of digital affinity spaces (Gee, 2004; Hillman, et al., 2021), where teachers can find their ‘tribe’ (AUTHOR & Enticott, 2020).

4. Social media research and the state of the field

When considering social media mediated PD it must be noted that there are many significant gaps within the literature (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019; Greenhow et al., 2020; Kredl & Colanino, 2017; Malik et al., 2019; Trust et al., 2017). Most notably for this paper, explorations of social media across platforms “at the intersection of open and closed affordances is rare” (Greenhow et al., 2020, p. 24) which this paper explores via the public (Twitter chat), the semi-public (FlipGrid video platform), and the private spaces (Twitter direct message (DM) group) inhabited

by the group. This is significant because literature (Iredale et al., 2020) has established that closed groups are useful for accessing support, which relates to one of the three themes located within our narratives. Although Flipgrid is not a social media platform, but rather a 'social learning community', noted for producing deeper, more critical responses than blog-based written responses (Stoszkowski, et al., 2020), it has been included here as it was central to the development of the reading group. In addition, using multiple, diverse social media and communication tools has been found to deepen the understanding of topics discussed (Macia & Garcia, 2016) and allows the creation and strengthening of social bonds (Zappavigna, 2018) within the group. It also allows professional development through "self-generating content and self-directed pathways for learning" (Prestridge, 2017, p. 100) which is demonstrated within the narratives provided below.

Most of the extant research has focussed on the effects of Twitter on student learning and engagement (Fox & Bird, 2017; Haşiloğlu et al., 2020; Malik, Heyman-Chrum & Johri, 2019). Here, we focus on teachers' use of social media for their own learning, and thus unrelated to student outcomes. Within this space, social media is presented as carrying many risks for teachers (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019; Carpenter & Krutka, 2017; Fox & Bird, 2017; Iredale et al., 2020; Lemon & O'Brien, 2019), including further intensification of work (Selwyn et al., 2017) as well as teachers becoming more accessible to students and families - to the detriment of their own health (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). It is also worth noting that parents and carers are more recently positioned as policy actors who can at times be hostile within broader education debates (Barnes, 2021). It must also be noted that not all teachers use social media for their professional identities or professional learning (Fox & Bird, 2017; Malik et al., 2019). Yet for those that do, some studies have established that professionals spend several hours per week informally learning with peers about work-related topics (Macia & Garcia, 2016).

One key gap in the research literature is that much of the findings are drawn from either Initial Teacher Education (ITE) (Iredale et al., 2020; Kelchtermans & Mars, 2020) or other university settings (Greenhow, et al., 2020; Macia & Garcia, 2016), likely due to the ease of access to a convenient research sample. However, social media allows for informal learning, and in service teachers have made use of this fact. This paper examines this aspect through an organic group of teachers not tied to a shared geography. This is unique, as most studies focus on local (Greenhow et al., 2020) or are geographically limited to developed nations (Macia & Garcia, 2016) most commonly the USA and Canada (Greenhow et al., 2020; Greenhalgh, 2021). Alternatively, these narratives provide international coverage, from Australia, which is underrepresented within the literature (Macia & Garcia, 2016) and France.

5. Methodology

This study makes use of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) through the discussion of critical events (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry affords teachers a vehicle to offer honest thoughts in response to critical events and in this case, it was experiences on Twitter as a member of #edureading. In the narratives documented below, four #edureading members (AUTHOR 1, AUTHOR 4, AUTHOR 5 and AUTHOR 3)

describe their experiences taking part in the community. Loh (2013) notes that often narrative research is questioned yet Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state the “apparency, verisimilitude and transferability,” when using narrative inquiry can be drawn upon when assessing the narrative inquiry’s quality, which “continue to be developed and about which we encourage narrative inquirers to be thoughtful” (p. 188).

Connelly and Clandinin (2000) note, “narrative inquiry is always multilayered and many stranded” (p. xvii) which is a way of telling a story with meaning making in mind. The narrative strands presented in this paper tell the stories of teachers, with a need to understand their experiences of #edureading as PD in mind. The prompts for generating the narratives in this study were devised collectively by the authors in an asynchronous conversation within a Twitter direct messaging (DM) group. The three prompts were used to elicit information in narrative form about: experiences with other PD in the past five years; reasons for joining #edureading, and the benefits and limitations based on experience and engagement with the readings; and the anticipated influence of #edureading participation in our future practice. After reading all of the narrative responses, the commonalities in what was said by each of us were identified by inductively coding the narratives by identifying common strands of ideas to find key themes.

In this article, each participant has chosen how to thematically frame relevant extracts from their source narratives, using a combination of direct quotes from the source narratives and paraphrased representations of key messages. What follows are accounts of the experiences of a group of like-minded educators, a mixture of teachers and teacher educators, investigating our reflections on the #edureading process.

6. Narrative inquiry findings

In this section, each report of the narrative inquiry begins with an outline of the participant’s educational background and current context, then moves to framing themes with excerpts from their respective written narratives.

6.1 AUTHOR 1

AUTHOR 1 is an English secondary teacher based in Victoria, Australia in the public-school sector with 10 years classroom experience. He is the curator and moderator of #edureading and often chooses the monthly article to be discussed. He welcomes others as curators and AUTHOR 4 and others have taken up this opportunity. His vision with relationships was clear from the beginning and this can be seen throughout the other three narratives.

His discussion demonstrates relationships on a global platform are valued for areas such as contextual knowledge to move beyond one’s own “backyard” or location. He notes:

“Over the past 5 years I’ve become much more discerning as a consumer of Professional Learning, mostly attending conferences as a speaker, presenter, or

facilitator. I engage with professional development as producer, consumer and participant, cycling through these roles depending on the quality of the learning being delivered. As someone who consumes and engages with a great deal of professional learning, taking different stances within the process has proved crucial.”

AUTHOR 1 also saw #edureading as an opportunity to engage not only with local education and presenters, but globally minded educators, or those from different contexts around the world. The orthodoxy of “this is what we have always done” pervades in Australia, as perhaps it does everywhere, so looking beyond one’s own metaphorical backyard has become AUTHOR 1’s way of countering this common trend in thinking.

Most of the learning prior to participating in #edureading was provided merely by having the time and space out of the classroom to think, ponder and reflect. The experiences that were most beneficial were those that most mirrored a classroom, bringing together intelligent people with a common goal, with some set readings to contextualise discussions, drawing together people from different contexts. Most of the learnings were contextual, rather than content, seeing who attended what kinds of events and how they interacted across borders between schools and within schools

“This experience and knowledge would have been rather hollow however if I had merely read these articles independently. Indeed, I had already read all of the three articles on each topic several times before #edureading engaged with them. By adding them to the #edureading discussion I was able to see that the views espoused, though convenient and clever, were really rather reductive when considered with actual teaching practice.”

6.2 AUTHOR 4

AUTHOR 4 is a secondary teacher from France with 19 years’ classroom experience in Life and Earth Sciences. He joined #edureading at the beginning in response to an announcement on Twitter by AUTHOR 1 who he had already been following on Twitter. AUTHOR 4 decided to join for the social aspect, he hoped this would be an opportunity to debate on topics in education on a global platform.

He notes he finds educational research articles appealing and likes the idea teachers aspire to keep improving. Relationships featured heavily in his responses:

“AUTHOR 1’s prompts on Flipgrid or Twitter allow us further thinking and see aspects of the article we might have missed. We can also see videos of colleagues, which helps to create a link between edureading members. Members’ personalities show up, through this medium, not only by what they say, but also by the attitudes or jokes they make. We get to know each other better.”

AUTHOR 4 has taught in France for 19 years, his narrative provides a point of contrast to AUTHOR 3, AUTHOR 1 and AUTHOR 5’s Australia-centric narratives. This offers some insight on cross country and institutional comparisons.

“In France, training is organized as follows. Teachers have a list of possible training sessions, that may be either disciplinary or interdisciplinary. The training sessions are optional and are not linked to any particular accreditation. As for PD, the vast majority of PD is provided by teachers who have been recognized for their pedagogical qualities or who have passed a certification in this respect. PD is therefore carried out by members of the National Education System who are all civil servants and are paid by the State.”

6.3 AUTHOR 2

AUTHOR 2 is a primary or elementary teacher with 27 years' experience as a public school teacher and lecturer in New South Wales, Australia. She currently works across both schools and higher education as she seeks to keep abreast with the reality of classroom teaching which she can then draw upon when teaching in the university setting.

AUTHOR 2 decided to join #edureading after AUTHOR 1 invited her, as she sought to understand how to effectively use and participate on Twitter. AUTHOR 2's discussion demonstrates an understanding of the value of user-friendly networking tools on a global platform with educators like herself who have a passion to support teachers and forge a reputation against the ongoing political rhetoric which has played on her mind for more than a decade.

She notes Twitter afforded her an opportunity to have her voice respectfully heard and to rigorously debate topics. AUTHOR 2's discussion shows she values respect afforded to her on Twitter which she notes has not always been the case when she teaches in Higher Education.

AUTHOR 2 approaches her learning as inquiry to support professional practice. She notes:

“Over the years whilst working in Higher Education I have often had my own approach to PLN by reading academic articles and seeking clarifications to support my understanding of coursework. As a general rule most convenors welcomed questions and this helped with effective practice when teaching. At times however, I found if leadership styles undermine collegiality and inquiry, I was not afforded opportunities to ask. I find this approach with leadership to be rather contradictory after teaching for so long. I can never understand why workplaces would not support inquiry and I often thought after reading many journal articles over the years on the topic, why would inquiring minds be silenced?”

According to AUTHOR 2, Twitter afforded her a “spark of opportunity” to raise her concerns and seek clarification about topics that were of interest to her on a global platform. To begin with, AUTHOR 5 observed #edureading, but increasingly felt confident as she saw others questioning research. AUTHOR 2 also notes that the anonymity afforded by Twitter meant that she felt more comfortable asking difficult questions. She goes on to note how she felt welcomed by other participants:.

“I was pleasantly surprised to note my ideas were listened to, embraced even, which influenced my decision to want to try and use Twitter as a platform to help me navigate my own PD. One year on, I am thankful to note I have connected with esteemed global educators including teachers and professors, who happily respond to my questions on theory, research, and my desire for effective practice.”

6.4 AUTHOR 3

AUTHOR 3 lives in Queensland, Australia and is a secondary English teacher with 6 years' experience in schools and 10 years in higher education as a lecturer. Like AUTHOR 4, she joined #edureading from the start in response to AUTHOR 1's advertisement. The #edureading group piqued her interest as she wanted to read more widely in the field of education and trusted AUTHOR 1 as a curator/organiser because she already knew him from her Twitter PLN. AUTHOR 3 values professional relationships in particular and conversations are valued as a vehicle to support her own professional learning and professional networking.

In this narrative, AUTHOR 3 sheds light on the range of fields that an educator might be interested in for professional development, as well as the benefit of conducting scholarly thinking with educators from a range of communities:

“My work in school and university overlapped for some time, and I continue to see myself as having dual professional identities – a university lecturer as well as a secondary English teacher. It can be hard to access enough PD to inform both of those focus areas, and expensive to get to the required range of events as most of my PD is self-funded. I find a lot of value in PD where other participants are negotiating similar overlaps in their work, where we can explore together ways of finding synergies in our scholarly, disciplinary and workplace interests.”

Other comments in the narrative aligned with the common theme across all narratives - that ideas under discussion form the backbone of experience in the #edureading community, rather than a focus on personalities or politics:

“I value being able to tune in to professional conversations at local, national and international levels, so my PD planning involves seeking events and communities to link with that will enable me to make these connections...”

“What I value most about #edureading is that it is an open and welcoming space for any educator to join, that it blends asynchronous and synchronous experiences, and that it is free (as in, it does not have a financial cost). I would miss out on broader conversations with informed colleagues about general education topics if it wasn't for #edureading. Unlike other social media hashtag chats or collectives, which are also open to a wide audience and free, the scholarly backbone of #edureading raises the bar in our discourse, asking us to talk in evidence-informed ways. There is a culture of respectful listening that I think is also established and maintained by AUTHOR 1 as the leader of our reading group, which cannot be underrated.”

Another notable theme in AUTHOR 3's narrative was the way in which using Twitter and other social media tools as the mediums for discussion created a more "level playing field" in discussion and debates, by enabling people to present as their "authentic selves":

"On the other hand, I believe doing PD work involves going to events as your authentic "self", rather than treating it as a CV opportunity, and being in networks authentically, as a co-learner in reciprocal dialogue. Traditional PD structures make this authentic and reciprocal dialogue difficult, as academic voices are elevated (via keynotes and panel talks) above teacher voices (typically confined to workshops and presentations), and then within those structures again the voices of power (the HODs, HATs and Professors) are elevated above the voices of classroom teachers and lecturers. My career planning and professional learning relies on carefully negotiating this constant tension between finding authentic dialogue and delivering career progressing performances."

7. Discussion

The following thematic categories emerged in the coding and discussion of the narratives as most significant:

1. teachers producing new knowledge using inquiry,
2. discussion of education beyond immediate cultural contexts,
3. expectation and support within the group for rigorous debate.

Notably, these themes are not found within the existing thematic exploration of social media PL (Macia & Garcia, 2016). For example, Parker et al. (2012) note success, guideposts, facilitators, roadblocks and potential as key features, whereas, Goodyear et al. (2019) note engagement and shared practices as core. This variation between other research themes and our own supports our position that #edureading is worthy of further examination.

7.1 Teachers producing new knowledge using inquiry

As part of #edureading, participants were required to position themselves as inquirers into their practice and research about teaching, critically questioning the relevance of the research to their particular contexts. As discussed in the literature review this runs counter to prevailing movements within education that seek standardisation of practice. Within #edureading it is often the educators who inform the research rather than the opposite direction. This concept is referred to by AUTHOR 5 within her narrative as "talking back to research", and AUTHOR 1 notes in his narrative his work as a producer of research, as well as a consumer. This marks a change in identity, from passive to active, for participants. Netolicky (2020) notes AITSL's framework promotes a traditional, facilitator-led model of PD and we suggest this PLN offers an alternative framework based upon ideals like teachers finding their tribe (AUTHOR & Enticott, 2020). Our study aligns with affinity spaces (Gee, 2004; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Hillman et al., 2012); come together because of shared interests and experiences. This was only made possible because of its online presence. AUTHOR 4 joined as he hoped for an opportunity to

debate educational topics, AUTHOR 5 joined as she felt she could pose difficult questions, AUTHOR 3 joined as she liked AUTHOR 1's approach and saw this an opportunity to discuss scholarly ideas. Finally, AUTHOR 1 notes "as someone who consumes and engages with a great deal of professional learning, taking different stances within the process has proved crucial" and this has resulted in shifts in his professional identity.

This identity shift is well represented by the action of producing this article and participating in research. It is not only research and "evidence-informed" teaching where teachers are often silent; it is also within the realm of policy. At points the group has engaged with policy-centric papers empowering teachers to share their thinking and ideas around these concepts. Indeed, the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) data notes that only 14% of teachers believe that policymakers in their country value their views and only 24% believe they could influence education policy (Hollweck & Doucet, 2020; OECD, 2019; Thomson & Hillman, 2019). When considering AUTHOR 4's narrative, he noted "PD is provided by teachers who have been recognized for their pedagogical qualities or who have passed a certification in this respect. This PD is therefore carried out by members of the National Education System". AUTHOR 1 notes he has begun to question "this is what we have always done" suggesting he is powerless to choose and act as he sees fit. This supports Mockler's (2020) discussion on control, accountability, and compliance for Australia and Mons et al., (2021) for France. This research is the first between Australia and France; previously the discourse has focused on the United States and Canada (Marcia & Garcia, 2019).

Participating in a shared inquiry is something that teachers may lack within their own settings, so engaging with ideas beyond their context may encourage teachers to deepen their own professional understanding, or to view it through a different lens. As well as this, the existing offerings of PD lack the ongoing nature as outlined by AUTHOR 4's narrative, which was in contrast with AUTHOR 1's. This idea will be explored further below.

7.2 Discussion of education beyond immediate cultural contexts

The group organically (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) brought together lifelong learners rather than seeking to create this in an artificial way creating or expecting this in any artificial manner (Goodyear et al., 2019) This notion of continual learning was promoted above and beyond existing qualifications, degrees or teaching or leadership positions aligning with Netolicky(2020; AUTHOR & AUTHOR, 2021) who argue online spaces allow for this relationship paradigm more readily. For example, AUTHOR 3 notes neither personalities nor politics are relevant, instead ideas are the focus, suggesting a sense of professionalism from within (Evetts, 2011). AUTHOR 5 notes she enjoys talking beyond political rhetoric supporting ideas put forward as noted by Mockler (2020). All four participants note looking beyond their own contexts was helpful. AUTHOR 3 notes #edureading explores ideas "local, national and international". AUTHOR 5 notes "I am thankful to note I have connected with esteemed global educators including teachers and professors, who happily respond to my questions on theory, research, and my desire for effective practice." As Stewart (2015) notes, online communities are places where traditional hierarchies are challenged, and spaces where members can develop the confidence to contribute to global conversations.

This focus further supported the concept that this was a shared affinity group (Gee, 2004) with learning and continual improvement being the focus as the group discusses diverse topics (Macia & Garcia, 2016). This was contrasted within the narratives against a range of alternative learning processes. For AUTHOR 4, professional learning was predominantly top-down and led by public servants limiting its attractiveness (Boudoncle, 2018; Basica & Stevenson, 2017; Evetts, 2011). For AUTHOR 3 there was mention of CV-filling activities occurring at conferences, whilst AUTHOR 5 reflected on some challenges within the Higher Education sector and finally AUTHOR 1 found fault with the localisation of professional learning. The concept of who accredits professional learning, who controls the means of delivering this and how actively teachers are involved in it is clear across the narratives. We conclude this study supports Mockler's (2020) ideas that compliance and accountability lead to teachers beginning to talk back to research and policy seeking to find what works best for them as individuals. This finding suggests choice which is not common in accredited PD is evident in our PLN and PLC. Perhaps, future research directions could explore more on the group dynamic such as itself is rather autodidactic, not seeking or requiring any accreditation or legitimisation of the process.

This self organising group (Greenlagh, 2017; Evetts, 2011) is open to anyone, regardless of teaching background or context. Whilst the barrier for entry is low, the expectations around rigour and engagement are high compared to other online social-media based groups or discussions. There is no cost, beyond a time commitment to be involved in the group and the discussions take place predominantly in an asynchronous manner, meaning it is possible to participate across different time zones.

Although it might be interesting for the Australian participants to discuss something as parochial as NAPLAN or even the Australian Curriculum's General Capabilities, this would prove irrelevant and uninteresting to the international members of the group. There is likely a broader point around the fact that it is even possible to select topics that are interesting across nations due to the homogenisation of education culture across English-speaking neoliberal systems that is beyond the scope of this article. However, by ignoring context, and embracing 'context collapse' (Marwick & Boyd, 2011), the ideas are able to be responded to by all participants in very different ways such as rethinking the commonalities between France and Australia such as a top-down approach to PD (Mons et al., 2021; Mockler, 2020). It is often clashing contexts that are the main driver for conflict online, as people assume their own context in others' statements to find fault (Carpenter & Harvey 2019). For example, an academic comments on their students and a kindergarten teacher pictures their own, and this miscommunication can lead to an argumentative exchange. Within this group, the lack of a shared context is important and clearly outlined, largely avoiding this issue. Each participant in this study demonstrates this. AUTHOR 5 is the only primary/elementary teacher, AUTHOR 3 and Steve are secondary teachers. One in High School and the other in Higher education. Finally, AUTHOR 4 is a secondary Science teacher in France. This dynamic suggests our vision: we talk on concepts not contexts, as noted by AUTHOR 3 is a key indicator for success. Much of the outcome of this group is identity development and identity definition amongst participants. As outlined by AUTHOR 5 and AUTHOR 3's narratives, working across multiple titles and spaces liminally, requires deft identity development. #edureading serves as an affinity group (Gee, 2004), with participants

who share a common passion but rarely a common context, raising (or excluding) the discussion beyond office or school politics, national politics or system policies.

7.3 Expectation and support within the group for rigorous debate.

Social media is broadly accessible, has a low barrier to entry, membership, and participation within its boundaries which is noted by each participant. Previous studies such as Iredale (2020) were set in Initial Teacher Education; Greenhow (2020) was set in university settings. Further, our study is offering new scope beyond current studies set in countries like the US and Canada (Macia & Garcia, 2016). The #edureading group has bigger “asks” of its participants both in a practical sense and in terms of the quality and tenor of debate. To be admitted to the group, members are asked to upload a short introductory video to Flipgrid. As Netolicky (2020) notes, “collaborative professional groups need to exist in an environment that provide both high support and high challenge” (p.48). Contributing multiple video responses after reading an academic article is a significant commitment, especially on social media where the barrier of entry is typically rather low. New members are then welcomed into the monthly Twitter and Flipgrid discussion forum where a great deal of sharing of ideas, articles and resources takes place around the article’s theme for the month.

As borne out by AUTHOR 3 and AUTHOR 1’s narratives, involvement in this group and its process can be viewed as a digression from the dominant professional development structures within their contexts. We, the authors, feel that there is validity in the model and that it warrants further exploration and replication within the education sector which are hallmarks for Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002; Loh, 2013). Not only because it serves as a challenge and alternative to existing models, but as outlined in the literature review because it and its participants position it as important for teacher autonomy and professionalism.

We view #edureading as providing a “democratic fora” where teachers and academics from various levels of their respective workplace hierarchies can come together to discuss important educational issues with mutual respect (AUTHOR & AUTHOR, 2021). As outlined in the narratives, different experiences of both academic and school teaching inform participation in the group, but it is the blending and engagement on the same level that is important in this space when we consider informal learning (Marcia & Garia, 2019). The common monthly focus on a scholarly article of interest to the group creates a community culture and a dedicated focus on ideas regardless of background, origin or context (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). The rigour of the discussion is brought by the academic and scholarly focus of the group. Though it is common for teacherly conversations to take place online, they tend to be aimed at beginners or novices, or require little preparation or deep thinking to participate. In such online forums, well established concepts such as coaching and retrieval practice are ever being re-introduced, often without any additive quality or sufficient depth to genuinely push these narratives forward. By reading research articles and expecting each other to engage with the article content as an entry point for discussion, teachers are required to debate in rigorous ways, moving beyond a non-committal re-tweet to think beyond their own space, engage with research findings and theoretical concepts, and actively adding layers to the discussion that follows. This supportive

environment for engaging with scholarship encourages teachers to speak back to research, often challenging and questioning the findings and proclamations of the paper itself.

8. Conclusion and our hopes for the future

As should be clear from the narratives we do not see ourselves as isolated from the work of teachers; indeed, we all work either in teaching or teaching-adjacent roles, and our focus here is very much on the development of the profession of teaching. We do this because the role that teachers play is vital to the continued health of democracy and civil society, in Australia and beyond. With this in mind, it is in all of our best interests to ensure that teachers are part of a well-informed and active profession. Alongside that, we also recognise that teaching is an active process, and teachers need to engage with current and developing research, as critical consumers and even producers, in order to ensure that they are fulfilling the demands of the role as successfully as possible. Current models of PD do not always meet these needs, and so, in this paper, we propose an alternative example of teacher-led, socially-mediated and research-focused PD. The affordances of social media mean that such an approach can extend beyond local and even national borders and take place both synchronously and asynchronously.

The future work of #edureading will be informed by the authors sharing their experiences in academic knowledge production in the *process* of writing this paper, as well as informed by the findings of this paper as a research *product*. As the #edureading PLC slowly grows in ways that will push us past the 50-member limit on Twitter direct message groups, our findings may help the community to navigate the problem of retaining group culture in an expanding group size. It is our hope that this example might also serve as an inspiration for future iterations of professional development that empower teachers through leveraging free online, social media tools.

References

- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2012). *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework*, AITSL.
- Barnes, N. (2021). Parents, carers, and policy labor: Policy networks and new media. *New Media & Society*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820979004>.
- Bascia, N., & Stevenson, H. (2017). *Organising teaching: Developing the power of the profession*. Education International.
- Beckett, D., & Hager, P. (2018). A complexity thinking take on thinking in the university. In *The Thinking University* (pp. 137-153). Springer.
- Bourdoncle, R., & Lumbroso, M. (2018). *La formation continue des enseignants du second degré: enquête sur les comportements et les attentes de formation continue et leurs déterminants*. Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique.

- Carpenter, J. P., & Harvey, S. (2019). "There's no referee on social media": Challenges in educator professional social media use. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 86, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102904>
- Carpenter, J. P., & Krutka, D. G. (2014). How and why educators use Twitter: A survey of the field. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 46(4), 414-434.
- Chang-Kredl, S., & Colannino, D. (2017). Constructing the image of the teacher on Reddit: Best and worst teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 64, 43-51.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1999). Chapter 8: Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. *Review of Research in Education*, 24(1), 249-305. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1167272>
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (2009a). Teacher research as stance. *The SAGE handbook of educational action research*, 39-49. Sage.
- Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (2009b). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. Teachers College Press.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Carney, M., Keefe, E., Burton, S., Chang, W., Fernandez, M. Miller, A., Sanchez, J. & Baker, M. (2018). *Reclaiming accountability in teacher education*. Teachers College Press.
- Cohen, D. K., & Hill, H. C. (1998). *Instructional Policy and Classroom Performance: The Mathematics Reform in California (RR-39)*. Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Cohen, D. K., & Hill, H. C. (2001). *Learning policy: When state education reform works*. Yale University Press.
- Connelly, M., & Clandinin, D. (1999). *Shaping a professional identity. Stories of educational practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Connelly, M., & Clandinin, D. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Curwood, J. S., & Biddolph, C. (2017). Understanding Twitter as a networked field site. *Implications for Research on Teacher Professional Learning*, (1), 81-103.
- Fox, A., & Bird, T. (2017). The challenge to professionals of using social media: Teachers in England negotiating personal-professional identities. *Education and Information Technologies*, 22(2), 647-675.
- Gee, J. P. (2004). Affinity spaces. Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling, *Kappa*, 99(6), 77-83.

- Goodyear, V. A., Parker, M., & Casey, A. (2019). Social media and teacher professional learning communities. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 24(5), 421-433.
- Gorur, R. (2011). ANT on the PISA trail: Following the statistical pursuit of certainty. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43(sup1), 76-93.
- Gorur, R. (2014). Towards a sociology of measurement in education policy. *European Educational Research Journal*, 13(1), 58-72.
- Greenhalgh, S. P. (2021). Differences between teacher-focused Twitter hashtags and implications for professional development. *Italian Journal of Educational Technology*, 29(1), 26-45.
- Greenhalgh, S. P., & Koehler, M. J. (2017). 28 days later: Twitter hashtags as "just in time" teacher professional development. *TechTrends*, 61(3), 273.
- Greenhow, C., Galvin, S. M., Brandon, D. L., & Askari, E. (2020). A decade of research on K-12 teaching and teacher learning with social media: Insights on the state of the field. *Teachers College Record*, 122(6), n6.
- Hargreaves, A. (2000). Four ages of professionalism and professional learning. *Teachers and Teaching*, 6(2), 151-182.
- Hargreaves, A., & O'Connor, M. T. (2018). *Collaborative professionalism: When teaching together means learning for all*. Corwin Press.
- Haşiloğlu, M. A., Çalhan, H. S., & Ustaoglu, M. E. (2020). Determining the views of the secondary school science teachers about the use of social media in education. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 29(3), 346-354.
- Hillman, T., Lundin, M., Rensfeldt, A. B., Lantz-Andersson, A., & Peterson, L. (2021). Moderating professional learning on social media: A balance between monitoring, facilitation and expert membership. *Computers & Education*, 168, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2021.104191>
- Hogan, A. & Lingard, B. (2019). Teachers' perceptions of commercialisation in Australian public schools: Implications for teacher professionalism. In: D. M. Netolicky, J. Andrews and C. Paterson (Eds), *Flip the system Australia: What matters in education* (pp. 19 - 29). Routledge.
- Hollweck, T. & Doucet, A. (2020). Pracademics in the pandemic: Pedagogies and professionalism. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 5(4), 295-305.
- Iredale, A., Stapleford, K., Tremayne, D., Farrell, L., Holbrey, C., & Sheridan-Ross, J. (2020). A review and synthesis of the use of social media in initial teacher education. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 29(1), 19-34.

- Kelchtermans, G. & Mars, V. (2020). The networking teacher in action: Qualitative analysis of early career teachers' induction process. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 87, 1-16.
- AUTHOR., & Enticott, E. (2020). Find your teacher tribe online: Twitter. *Idiom*, 56(2), 40–41. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.307127283875363>
- AUTHOR, ., & AUTHOR, . (2021). Education focused pracademics on Twitter: Building democratic fora. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-11-2020-0090>
- Kumar, P., & Gruzd, A. (2019). Social media for informal learning: A case of #Twitterstorians. *Proceedings of the 52nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 2019.
- Kurtz, C. F., & Snowden, D. J. (2003). The new dynamics of strategy: Sense-making in a complex and complicated world. *IBM Systems Journal*, 42(3), 462-483.
- Lemon, N., & O'Brien, S. (2019). Social Media use in Initial Teacher Education: Lessons on knowing where your students are. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(12), 38-56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2019v44n12.3>
- Loh, J. (2013). Inquiry into issues of trustworthiness and quality in narrative studies: A perspective. *The qualitative report*, 18(33), 1. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2013.1477>
- Macià, M., & García, I. (2016). Informal online communities and networks as a source of teacher professional development: A review. *Teaching and teacher education*, 55, 291-307.
- Malik, A., Heyman-Schrum, C., & Johri, A. (2019). Use of Twitter across educational settings: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0166-x>
- Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114-133.
- Mockler, N. (2020). Teacher professional learning under audit: Reconfiguring practice in an age of standards. *Professional Development in Education*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1720779>
- Mons N., Chesné J.-F., Piedfer-Quêney L. (2021). How to improve policies for the continuing education and professional development of education staff? *Dossier de synthèse*. Paris: CNESCO -CNAM. Retrieved from: http://www.cnesco.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Cnesco_CCI_formation_continue_Dossier_de_synthese_210226.pdf
- Netolicky, D. M., Andrews, J., & Paterson, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Flip the system Australia: What matters in education*. Routledge.

- Netolicky, D. M. (2019). *Transformational professional learning: Making a difference in schools*. Routledge.
- Netolicky, D. M. (2020). Transformational professional learning: What, why and how?. *Independent Education*, 50(1), 32.
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019). *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*. OECD Publishing.
- Pelkey, S. & Stelmach, B. & Hunter, D. (2021) Texts, lies, and mediascapes: Communication technologies and social media as risk in the educational landscape. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 196.
- Prestridge, S. (2017). Conceptualising self-generating online teacher professional development. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 26(1), 85-104.
- Rosell-Aguilar, F. (2018). Twitter: A professional development and community of practice tool for teachers. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 1, 6.
<https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.452>
- Rust, F. O. C. (1999). Professional conversations: New teachers explore teaching through conversation, story, and narrative. *Teaching and teacher education*, 15(4), 367-380.
- Sahlberg P. (2016). Global Educational Reform Movement and its impact on teaching. In K. Mundy, A. Green, B. Lingard and A. Verger (Eds.), *The Handbook of Global Education Policy* (pp. 128-144). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Sachs, J. (2001). Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(2), 149-161.
- Selwyn, N., Nemorin, S., Bulfin, S., & Johnson, N. F. (2017). *Everyday schooling in the digital age: High school, high tech?*. Routledge.
- Sharma, D. (2018, June 17). Antiquated school day is failing everyone. *The Age*.
<https://www.theage.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/antiquated-school-day-is-failing-everyone-20180615-p4zlnu.html>
- Stewart, B. (2015). Open to influence: What counts as academic influence in scholarly networked Twitter participation. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 40(3), 287-309.
- Stoszkowski, J., Hodgkinson, A., & Collins, D. (2020). Using Flipgrid to improve reflection: A collaborative online approach to coach development. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 26(2), 167-178.
- Symeonidis, V., & Stromquist, N. (2020). Teacher status and the role of teacher unions in the context of new professionalism. *Studia paedagogica*, 25(2), 23-45.

Thomson, S., & Hillman, K. (2019). The Teaching and Learning International Survey 2018. *Australian Report Volume 1: Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*.

Trust, T., Carpenter, J. P., & Krutka, D. G. (2017). Moving beyond silos: Professional learning networks in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 35, 1-11.

Webster, L. & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching*. Routledge.

William, D. (2016). *Leadership for teacher learning*. Learning Sciences International.

Zappavigna, M. (2018). *Searchable talk: Hashtags and social media metadiscourse*. Bloomsbury Publishing.