# The professional benefits of Social Networking Sites for teachers

Teachers are passionate about their subject areas and in the current Neoliberal environment of education, in which languages other than English are not particularly valued, language teachers can at times feel isolated and threatened (Smyth 2003, Ditchburn 2013). Social Networking Sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn can foster a sense of belonging and community as they provide a platform where people can network, connect, develop ideas, share resources and build friendships, despite location (Merchant 2012). This creates numerous possibilities for teachers located in diverse regions of the world to connect with one another. Often language teachers are the only people teaching their subject in a school, or even across a number of sites, and as a result they are habitually working in isolation (Lamb 2012). This isolation is harmful to their learning and professional growth and it is therefore imperative that these teachers build networks with others (Lieberman and Pointer Mace 2010, Lamb 2012). Social networks empower teachers with the opportunity to publicly produce and share their work, ideas and knowledge (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010). By publicly sharing work, ideas and reflections, a new dialogue around education and teaching is created (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010). In this way, social networking sites are enabling teachers to be involved in continuous professional learning and improvement to their practice (Lieberman and Pointer Mace 2010, Schreurs 2014).

Establishing both local and global connections helps to build teacher professional identity through the gathering and production of resources, sharing of knowledge and development of their practice (Lamb, 2012). Social Networking Sites enable educators to collaborate with others on real life projects and to learn from one another at any given time, rather than only at formal professional development events (Schreurs 2014). These sites provide the opportunity for teachers to ask for and give one another immediate feedback and advice, therefore changing the way that teachers learn their practice (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010). This offers a new way of building professional learning communities as teachers are in control of their own learning and can self-direct their professional development despite location (Lamb 2012, Merchant 2012).

Reflection points:

* We know that technology can vastly support and transform student learning in our classrooms, but what about our own professional learning?
* Online social networks enable teachers to be involved in continuous professional development and learning (‘informal PD’). How effective is ‘formal’ PD (external facilitators, day workshops, conferences etc.) for you?
* How easily do you transfer what you learn at ‘formal PD’ events to your teaching practice? How much do you ‘take away’ from these events and how much of what you learn truly changes your teaching practice?
* We expect our students to connect globally and be creative in their learning. What about our own connections and learning?

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