

## **#tweetez-vousfrançais?**

# **Students' perspectives on Twitter as a pedagogical tool to enhance learning in the post-primary second language classroom.**

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*(Received January 2019; final version received April 2019)*

### **Abstract**

We are living in the information age; our teaching and learning must adapt to this shift (Rosen, 2010). There are over 100 million active users posting over 500 million tweets a day which validates Twitter as an authentic and worthwhile place for literacy development. Twitter offers an educator the opportunity to connect a class to the outside world; it connects the students themselves to a diverse community outside the microcosm of the classroom. This study looks at students' thoughts on the use of social media – namely Twitter – to enhance the learning of a second language in a post-primary French classroom in Ireland. A controlled group of fifth year students took part in the study. They submitted reflective diaries via email and interviews were conducted and recorded. The results of this study suggest that the use of Twitter in language teaching has a future, but has to be implemented properly and gradually.

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## **Overview**

Social media has changed the way many people interact with each other. Some young people spend hours each day on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other similar sites. Social media appeals to post-primary students as it offers an accessible gateway to a context outside of the classroom. It offers French YouTubers, French rap videos, poetry, quizzes, celebrity gossip, news stories and overall, a sense of French culture. It gives a teacher the tools to really educate the students for life-long learning, not just to succeed in the exam. Participating on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook is an everyday occurrence for this generation of learners and has become entrenched in their daily routine, just like school. Could these two quotidian activities be merged together and fused symbiotically to enhance learning in the French language classroom of an Irish post-primary school?

## **Literary Review**

Digital literacy is defined as ‘a shorthand for the myriad social practices and conceptions of engaging in meaning making mediated by texts that are produced, received, distributed, exchanged, etc., via digital codification’ (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008, p.5). Future workforces must be competent and skilled in technology and digital literacy so as to ‘participate in social and economic development’ (OECD, 2011, p.3). Greenhow and Gleason (2013) write about how literacy is constantly changing; it is no longer just about reading and writing printed text. According to Coiro et al. (2014), digital literacy is as important nowadays as traditional literacy. The advocates of new literacies see literacy from a sociocultural perspective and recognise that it’s ‘dynamic, multimodal, situationally specific, and socially mediated’ (Gleason, 2018, p.166). It is culturally influenced and is current, communicating the language of the moment which is dominant in a society at that particular time (Apkon, 2013). Digital literacies and new literacies are mutually influential (Gleason, 2018). Indeed, Swarts (2019), drawing on Floridi’s (2014) ‘onlife’ concept challenges us to think about how new modes of communication and artificial intelligence challenge the education professions to develop student understandings and experiences in a digital world. The traditional literacies are challenged by new ways of expression where people can be authors and audience and can co-create texts that reflect aspects of popular culture. It would appear that students may put more effort into their work when there is a sense of audience (Ramsay, 2014; Grisham and Wolsey, 2006).

As social media platforms are easily accessed, they have become a popular medium through which people can exchange ideas and communicate with each other. Twitter, a popular microblogging site, is used to communicate with short messages (restricted to 280 characters) and has great potential in education (Harmandaoglu, 2012; Rossell-Aguilar, 2018; Miller, Morgan and Koronkiewicz, 2018). Tweets can be text, images or video clips and followers can show appreciation and interact by favouriting a tweet. Hashtags (#) are used to link ideas and topics, connecting users with similar interests. Users have a profile with a @username and they can follow anyone who is a member of the Twitter community (Gleason, 2013). Tweeting engages students; it offers a more relaxed style of communication. It gives students the opportunities to be creative and work collaboratively. Vygotsky (1978, p. 118) felt that “writing should be meaningful for children...writing should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for life”. The use of Twitter in the classroom offers authenticity; it connects the learner to the outside world and highlights the relevance of the subject to real life (Greenhow and Gleason, 2012).

However, Twitter can also result in bad grammar practice, addiction and may be time-consuming (Grosbeck and Holotescu, 2008). Vie (2007) argues that interactions on social media are often quite brief and may encourage less formal language and spelling. Yet, Greenhow and Gleason (2012) claim that using social media is not harmful to a student's command of English nor does it affect academic learning. Students edit and rewrite their tweets so as to produce a concise message; literacy practices have to be different on Twitter due to its limited character count. These twenty-first-century learners are becoming more and more connected and immersed in a world of digital devices. They are very dependent on technology and 'have radically new expectations regarding what a quality learning experience should be' (Pedro, 2009, p.2).

Web 2.0 technologies include social networking sites, blogs, wikis, virtual learning environments and apps; in other words, Web 2.0, or the *social web*, is comprised of online tools that encourage collaboration, interaction and communication. These tools are a reflection of the activities outside of the classroom that learners use to engage with the world. Therefore, they are the obvious choice for creating a technology-based online environment (Groff, 2013). Selwyn (2010) says that the best learning occurs in technology-supported environments where students can both singularly and cooperatively engage with and create something. Web 2.0 promotes interconnectivity between users; it has also been called 'participatory media' (Bull et al, 2008, p.106) and 'social digital technologies' (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p.1). Knowledge is co-constructed by its users and validated through peer review in a community (Dede, 2008). Web 2.0 allows learners to be creative and participate autonomously in their own learning (Greenhow et al, 2009). Web 2.0 offers learners a 'participatory culture' which may take the form of *affiliations* such as social networks (Jenkins et al., 2009). This contributes to making learning more meaningful, social, real and cooperative. There is evidence that technology-rich learning environments can increase motivation, engagement and confidence in students (Blamire, 2009).

However, we must also recognise that long-lasting learning does not occur by simply exposing students to technology. Digital technology also promotes interaction with the technology itself and of course, other learners. Students work together to solve problems and co-construct content interactively online; it is cooperative learning for the twenty-first century. Slavin (2010) believes that this is instrumental in more meaningful learning for students. Student driven inquiry is seen to be authentic and is reputed to engage students on a deeper level than other types of teaching. Baron & Darling Hammond (2010) say that research is pointing to the fact that student driven inquiry leads to better performance and longer lasting learning. They also say that it is the process required to promote skills such as collaborative problem solving and critical thinking. Technology is not imperative to this type of learning but it definitely helps.

However, the use of these new technologies has the potential to move pedagogy towards a more personal sphere; engaging the students of today will mean connecting with them in a more personalised manner (Langridge, 2003, in Groff, 2013). Students may have different views on using technology for academic purposes; they may be slow to adopt technology for teaching and learning (Pedro, 2009). These underlying beliefs about teaching and learning may inhibit educational change in the classroom (Groff & Mouza, 2008). Their prior experiences of learning may be comprised of more formal methods than using technology personally at home (Margaryan et al, 2010, in Groff, 2013). There are potential areas of motivation and resistance

on the part of students regarding the blurring of lines between formal and informal learning and the use of technology in the classroom (OECD, 2012).

Young people connect online and publish their interests on social media but they need to understand the positives and negatives of this practice. Online social interaction can be valuable and formative; it is invaluable in how it prepares the youth for a digital future. However, there are risks involved, namely threats to privacy and harmful interactions. Online activity can never be erased; this 'digital footprint' is indelible. Vie (2007) argues that young people don't seem to understand the notion of privacy; there seems to be a failure to separate what is public and what is private or what this lack of understanding may imply. As time has passed and young people have become more conscious of social media and privacy, this situation seems to have changed. Young people are now more likely to have privacy settings on their social media but they are also likely to have larger friend/ follower circles and tend to share more of their personal lives within this private circle (Madden et al., 2013) Teachers engaging social media in their teaching may also need instruct their students in the ways of *netiquette*, so as to avoid offending others or affecting their own online credibility. Education needs to teach students how to become responsible users of technology (OECD, 2010).

New technologies are changing how we view teaching and learning and so transformation and innovation are the new focus. The learners of the 21<sup>st</sup> century demand more from education than what the traditional methods can offer. Huge advances in educational technology have created new challenges; we must re-invent teaching and learning to suit this new generation (Groff, 2013). Through the use of social media, students and their peers become part of a virtual community of learners and ultimately may become more efficient learners (Fewkes and McCabe, 2012). Social media may be a useful tool to facilitate interaction and active participation as it encourages communication and collaboration; - both of which are imperative to student learning (Hrastinski, 2009; Yu et al, 2010). Lamb and Johnson (2010) suggest that teachers can use social media as a tool to present course material in different ways in order to develop creativity in learners. Using social media can move students away from rote learning of coursework and instead promote individual creativity. It may allow students to look at information and engage with same in different ways.

However, Appel (2012) found that a student's prior knowledge regarding technology and computer usage affected how a student viewed learning outcomes from online tasks. Also, technology does not guarantee learning on an individual level. Despite a teacher's best intentions, a discussion on social media may go off-topic as social media itself is seen as primarily a social tool (Lin et al, 2013). It may also have a negative effect on a student with regard to distracting them from their academic work. Students may not be able to reconcile both social media and course work efficiently (Hurt et al, 2012). boyd (2007) feels that students would benefit from learning how to use this technology with the help and guidance of teachers. Social media may promote interaction between students that may feel too shy or intimidated to speak out in class (Junco et al, 2011). A child who is too intimidated to speak aloud in the class may find it easier to share ideas and beliefs through the medium of a social network. Similarly, Warschauer (1997) found that computer mediated communication can result in more equal participation than face-to-face interaction; in short, it gives the less vocal learner a chance to be heard. Social media changes the traditional format of communication between teachers and students (Krutka and Carpenter, 2016). It offers teachers a platform to enhance the curriculum outside of the traditional classroom (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012).

Davis (2012) says that young people engage socially on social media in a way that was previously unfeasible. The advantages are numerous. Tweets are concise and instant. It connects students to the real world and gives the quieter student a voice. It encourages reflection and summarisation of thoughts, focusing the student on exactly what they want to say. It may change the classroom atmosphere in a positive way, giving students a greater role in their learning (Harmandaoglu, 2012). As boyd (2014) says, social media is a fundamental part of young people's lives today.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Sociocultural theory focuses on the idea that the human mind is mediated by social, historical and cultural contexts. Vygotsky (1978) wrote that people rely on tools, both physical and symbolic, to change the world in which they live. Culture adapts with each generation to meet the needs of that particular society and so these tools are modified also. Technology has changed dramatically in the last thirty years and so this generation's cultural inheritance is very different to that of their grandparents. Vygotsky (1978) wrote about how social interaction can be used as a tool for learning. He believed that a child's potential can be furthered when a child is working in a supportive, interactive, social environment. Social media, such as Twitter, is an ideal platform for this social, collaborative learning as it invites students to interact with each other and connect. It also encourages scaffolding in a relaxed environment. Twitter provides a *learning ecology*, which Barron (2006, p.195) describes as 'a set of contexts found in physical or virtual places that provide opportunities for learning'. It is a perspective that assumes that learning happens from shared activities in a social environment mediated by tools during the whole experience. Learning can also be a natural result of being a participating member of a community of practice - a group of people who share an interest in a subject and enhance their learning and knowledge by interacting with each other on a continuous basis (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002). Siemens (2005) puts forward the learning theory of connectivism - the idea that learning is perpetually in flux as new information is constantly being gained. Deciding if new information is relevant is an essential component of connectivism. The main feature of learning as a situated activity is a process called *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Novices become members of a community of practice and as a result of fully participating in this community, their skills and knowledge are enhanced through their interactions with the group and the activities of the group. In this sense, Twitter is the source and site of the learning practices associated with learning in this group.

## **Methodology**

This research study adopted an interpretivist stance, believing that different people view the world in a variety of ways; reality is created by the human mind (Bassey, 1990). The world is not just the world, but the world experienced by a person (Huntly, 2008). A Twitter profile was specifically set up for a fifth year French group (Fig.1). It had the highest privacy settings and only students approved by the teacher could 'follow' the teacher. This rendered it a controlled group.



(Fig.1 Example of Twitter profile)

Strict guidelines were laid out to ensure that the research process was ethically grounded. Consent from parents and assent from the students were obtained also. The participants were anonymous and in order to protect their identities, all names in this research are pseudonyms. A group was chosen with a similar background, position and experience. The group was a fifth year higher level French class from an all-female post-primary school in a rural town in Ireland. The group was comprised of 22 students and the average age was seventeen years old. They were all from similar socio-economic backgrounds. All of them had access to the internet. Two girls opted not to take part in the research as they were not regular users of social media and had no interest in being part of the research.

The research process took three weeks. Relevant posts from French-based organizations, newspapers, magazines, news channels, celebrity gossip feeds were re-tweeted to the students. Throughout this process, certain tasks were set for the students to perform asynchronously. A specific class hashtag was created with regard to a theme being covered in class and this was included in all tweets for continuity. The students were required to tweet in French in relation to this particular hashtag. They were also encouraged to respond to each other's tweets and to interact *en français*. Monitoring their activity online showed the levels of participation and engagement.

Every Friday during the three-week period, the girls were required to submit a reflection via email with their thoughts and feelings on the process. Digital diaries were chosen as the research was internet based. This method of data collection was effective because it was user friendly for the students and emails could be retrieved at anytime from anywhere. With regard to the students in this research process, they may have felt as though they had to tweet out of duty in order to have something to say in the diary entry. It was clearly evident that some girls emailed out of obligation due to the brevity of their emails and the inconsistency of their participation in the task. Overall, the email submissions were short and had a variety of positive and negative opinions.

Four small focus groups were conducted so that the participants could interact and engage with each other rather than with the interviewer (Cohen et al, 2007). A positive aspect of this open-ended type of discussion is that it can generate a lot of data and is quite manageable to conduct efficiently. However, bias may occur as the interviewer may have certain views on the topic and this may affect the data collected. Selltiz et al (1962) say that ‘interviewers are human beings and not machines, and their manner may have an effect on respondents.’ Being a teacher and in a position of power may have affected data. Students may tell you what they think you want to hear, rather than what they truly think.

The focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Colour coding helped in the analysis of this data. Huntly (2008) outlines a comprehensive checklist for the analysis of data. First, I read the transcripts a few times to acquire a coherent grasp of students’ conceptions. The resulting themes that emerged through repeated reading were colour coded with a highlighter and then copied and pasted into separate word documents. This created distinct records of similar themes and opinions - of the shared understanding of the students – for detailed analysis. Relevant quotes from the students were added and then the information was combined in a ‘pool of data’ (p.131). The following section focuses on these thematic findings.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Incidental Vocabulary Development**

*‘Twitter is a great way to get everyone’s attention, all in the one place at the one time.’*  
Anna

One of the main attractions of using Twitter in French class was the exposure to incidental language. Students felt that by having random posts in their Twitter feed, they were able to pick up vocabulary that they may not have noticed in their textbooks. Mary said:

*‘If I read the sentence and there was one word I didn’t know, it would bug me so I would look it up’*

The re-tweeting of French dictionary posts was successful; they liked the fact that random vocabulary appeared in their Twitter feeds every day and found that they could remember it easily. This vocabulary was not obligatory to learn and was subsequently internalised easily. This is in line with Siemens (2005) and the theory of connectivism; these students were gaining new knowledge everyday via social media and this informal learning was more significant. Through this community of practice on Twitter, the skills and knowledge of these students were enhanced. They enjoyed this experience which resulted in a high level of student engagement. In short, they could see the relevance of their learning. This data shows that technology can indeed enhance learning and can facilitate language acquisition. This finding agrees with Blamire (2009) and Slavin (2010) who both promote the use of technology in the classroom to increase student motivation and engagement.



The use of Twitter in class promoted interaction between L2 learners which subsequently aided SLA. Fiona felt that Twitter was 'interactive' and when reading her peers' tweets, she had to look up vocabulary in order to follow the conversation. She felt like she was learning from her classmates and this was worthwhile and beneficial. She said:

*'Tweeting my friends in French made the whole experience of picking up vocab fun, instead of the monotonous every-day book learning of traditional education'*

The students had shared goals and the social interaction that followed was generally relaxed and enjoyable. The activities selected by the teacher were for some, ahead of their capabilities. This did not impede participation as they were interested in the subject matter and liked taking part.

Turuk (2008) proposes that SLA should be a collaborative achievement as he believes a learner should not be isolated. There was significant interaction between the students themselves as they responded to and 'favorited' each other's tweets. The stronger French speakers inspired and guided the less able, a practice aligned with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory. They enhanced their learning by being participating members of a community of practice where the shared goal was responding to a hashtag in a concise and amusing manner. Through this legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991), the students' linguistic skills were enhanced as they desired to be full practitioners in the class community. They pushed the boundaries of their linguistic skills to communicate. They benefitted from interacting with others and using the language in context.

### **Twitter as an Authentic Learning Environment**

This study also revealed that students find it hard to link educational subject matter to real-life functionality. Amy said that it was great to have somewhere to 'use the French language properly, as we really don't have that'. This study offered them an authentic learning environment with a purpose. Carol said:

*'I liked that I could get use out of the language outside of the classroom because it makes me feel like my learning isn't pointless'*

She went on to add that 'French is such a pretty language and it's frustrating not having anywhere to actually use it in real, everyday life'. Another respondent, Beth, said that she could imagine 'tweeting real French people' in the future, as this process gave her the opportunity to practise. The ultimate goal of a language teacher is to connect their subject to the outside world. Forty minutes of French a day is not adequate for SLA as the pressures of the curriculum overshadow the natural exposure to incidental language.

The vocabulary taught on a daily basis is theme-based and contrived. It is designed to equip L2 learners with the language input to succeed in the *production écrite* section of the exam. Student output is limited due to time constraints and large class numbers. Vygotsky (1978) felt that writing should be meaningful to students and relevant to their lives. It is only then that they see the purpose of their learning. Of all the subjects that they study, French offers learners a context outside of the classroom. Irrespective of what



is studied in higher education, a modern language will have relevance in later life, even if it's only for a camping holiday in the summer.

Using Twitter in class offers authenticity which increases motivation. Greenhow and Gleason (2012) and Ushioda (1996) concur with this; the idea that authentic language use connects the learner to the outside world and being understood in this language is motivating. Lomicka and Lord (2009) also proposed that learners who connect with each other in the L2 on social media should be inclined to go on to connect with L2 speakers in the real world. An integrated curriculum is appropriate here, one where teachers guide their students through projects that enrich their learning experience. This study engaged the students in conversation that challenged their thinking (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009).

### **Tweeting and Productive Language**

During the research process, the students were given designated hashtags in class to respond to at home that night. A hashtag (#) is used by Twitter users to create a trend or theme that followers may respond to. For example, one such hashtag was *#loterie* where students had to write in French what they would do if they won the lotto. From an educator's point of view, it required the students to use the 'si' construction, a grammatical rule associated with the conditional tense. It generated a lot of response with tweets ranging from taking the family on holiday, to renovating the fifth year classrooms of the school.

Every tweet that was posted had a class hashtag (for example, *#frenchclass*) so that everyone could keep track of activity. The use of emojis was prevalent also; these little symbols added a whole new dimension to expression. When asked afterwards if the grammar made more sense, every single student who tweeted agreed fervently that they 'didn't even notice' learning the tense as they were too busy coming up with original ideas. One girl in particular called Donna said that tweeting in French was 'fun', especially when there was a designated hashtag. In order to participate, she was forced to look up certain words that she didn't know and subsequently she remembered them. She also had to revise her verbs before tweeting. She said that this didn't feel like a 'chore' and she felt more confident afterwards. This is in line with Swain's (2000) output hypothesis; it is only through language output that the learner may notice holes in their interlanguage and so will attempt to fill these gaps. This student-driven inquiry, according to Baron & Darling Hammond (2010), leads to longer lasting learning. Donna summarised it with 'when you go to the effort to look it up, you remember it'.

The general consensus was that they liked tweeting when they had a fun hashtag to follow. There was less of an uptake when the hashtag was of a more serious nature. They liked when it linked to them personally. This is in accordance with Lemke (2002) who calls for education to connect to the students' lives, leaving behind the notion that school is an 'alternate reality' (p.43). Lightbown and Spada (2006) feel that children will be motivated to learn in a classroom where they enjoy themselves. Therefore, the most engaging hashtags were along the lines of *#chansonfavorite* (*#favourite song*), *#quepréfères-tu?* (*#wouldyou rather?*) and *#célébritéfavorite* (*#favourite celebrity*).

The interactions were analysed between the students on Twitter, it was clear that they had shirked the formal communication of the French classroom. Despite the fact that

there was a teacher interacting with them and accessing their tweets, their choice of language, emojis, punctuations and intonations showed emotion and thoughts that would not normally be expressed in the formal infrastructure of the classroom. Consider the following example:

@msbell #quepréfèrestu? Être célibataire pour toute la vie ou être sans  
abri pour toute la vie ? ☺  
(@msbell #wouldyourather? Be single for all your life or be homeless all  
your life?)

This example of a tweet posted shows the relaxed nature of the interaction during this research. The students were given an outlet for expression that they would not have on a normal basis. They seemed to enjoy this opportunity as they could push boundaries and be themselves. This finding aligns with Lamb and Johnson (2010) who suggested that teachers can present the course in different ways via social media, which in turn increases creativity in students.

### **Social Media and (Dis) Engagement**

However, some saw it as a ‘waste of time’ and are not avid users of social media even for social purposes. One respondent, Claire, said:

*‘Personally, social media does not play a huge part in my life,  
Twitter in particular. Therefore, signing into Twitter purposely to tweet  
in French was slightly out of my daily routine’*

When asked about what motivates them to learn, another participant, Céline, said, ‘the goal at the end, I want to get good marks in the Leaving Cert.’ She added that everything else is seen as ‘pointless’ and ‘a waste of time’. Another student called Angela said that she learns things by repeating them over and over again until they sink in. I then asked her if she remembered them after the test and she shook her head. ‘Just for the test,’ she answered. This negative backwash effect of summative assessment was very evident during the research process. The majority of the students’ primary focus was the terminal exam and results. Using social media for incidental learning would be in variance with this attitude, so negativity was to be expected. One girl, Jennifer said that she would have to be told to go on line by the teacher. When probed about this she said that she would never initiate a French conversation on her own. She would have to be told what to write as she doesn’t see the point of it. Students indeed have underlying beliefs about what learning should be and are not interested in anything that deviates from this. This attitude concurs with Pedro (2009) and Groff & Mouza (2008). Getting the points for entry to university is what inspires them to study and motivates them to learn. I feel that this contradicts Rosen (2010) who feels that traditional methods of teaching no longer inspire our iGeneration. This study shows that they are not always as open to change as anticipated. Galagan (2010) also feels that this new generation need adapted teaching styles. Again, this was not backed up by many of the students who seemed to prefer the predictability and safety of the old ways.

Also, the isolated nature of the research process itself had a negative effect on student participation as some of the girls felt that it was too short and contrived. Claire felt that

she wasn't sure if it was a good way of teaching a language but maybe if there was a bigger group of people doing it, it might be more successful.

Mandy felt that if using Twitter in class was more the norm, it may not be such a 'weird thing'. She added that it was a 'good idea' but she felt on the spot when asked to tweet in French. She can't see it being a success in her age bracket as she and her peers were not 'brought up' with it. Despite being exposed to computers all her life and a participating member of the iGeneration, she felt that social media was too new and revolutionary for academic use. One possible explanation for this finding is that the summative nature of the high stakes Leaving Certificate examination is the overarching influence on the learning experience.

### **Twitter and Informal Learning**

Angela said that using Twitter during study time was a 'huge distraction'. She said:

*'You easily get distracted if you go on to tweet in French. You see all these other tweets from celebrities and friends and you stay on for ages'*

Another respondent, Rosa, said that once she tweets, she feels compelled to wait for a reply and therefore wastes time. She also felt obliged to tweet and saw it as a 'chore' to post something. Again, she ended up getting distracted and looking at things that had 'nothing to do with French'.

Self-control seemed to be an issue here. They felt that they could not just scroll down through their Twitter feed for the sole purpose of French. Its attraction is so powerful they would end up wasting time. This is in line with Hurt et al (2012) who are of the opinion that students may not be able to reconcile social media and academic learning and therefore get distracted. Fewkes & McCabe (2012) felt that learners who participated on social media become more efficient learners. This study dis-confirms this to an extent. Learning in Irish post-primary schools is certainly efficient, but also seems to be soul-less, strategic and exam-driven. Success is the desired result and this does not allow time for distraction or incidental learning.

Therese said:

*'I think it invades your time to relax. You need a break from school. There is a point where education must stop and you need to relax'*

Rachel felt that French tweets interfered in her personal life. She didn't want other people outside of school looking at her homework. She felt that her French tweets would 'annoy' her followers, especially if they did not speak the language. Vie (2007) indeed put forward the idea that students might see it as an invasion of their personal space. Pedro (2009) talked about how students may not be as open to using technology for academic purposes as assumed. They may not be able to reconcile their established and entrenched beliefs of how a classroom should be with this new relaxed social pedagogy. They may not accept the juxtaposition of formal and informal learning.

When asked about clicking on links to news stories or articles, Rachel went on to say that she wouldn't bother clicking on a link as it takes too long to download. This points to the instant gratification expectations of the digital age - the reluctance to wait - the need for immediate information at the click of a button. Rachel added that she didn't really understand the headlines anyway and that she had no desire to translate them as they weren't on the 'course'. This is in line with Snyder (1971) and his description of the hidden curriculum. Students tend to focus on what matters in the exam above everything else.

## **Netiquette**

All of the respondents exhibited a cautious attitude to what they posted online. There seemed to be a real awareness around the fact that every tweet or post leaves an indelible mark. Christine said that when she tweets something she knows that it can be 'referred back to whenever. It's like there... forever'.

The common fear that was articulated by several students was the fact that 'future employers might see [your] social media and that is really dangerous'. Another student went on to say that 'you have to behave respectfully and that's the way it is... you should be careful and not post things that are inappropriate'. Several students said that they never curse online, as bad language is 'nasty' and can never be deleted. The main idea was that you have to be careful when you write something on social media so as to make sure that you are 'not offending anyone in particular.' I was surprised by the level of netiquette amongst the students I engaged with. It certainly pointed to the fact that the respondents in my group had a real understanding of what was private and public. This contradicted Vie (2007) who found that students lack awareness when it comes to privacy and posting online.

A recurrent suggestion that emerged from my findings was the introduction of social media use in class during transition year. Jones and Bissoonauth-Bedford (2008) talked about how time-consuming it would be to train the students so this would be the perfect solution. Transition year is not deemed a busy year and so would give the students a chance to become accustomed to this new way of learning. The OECD (2010) report outlines that students should be an integral part of the transformation of classroom practice to a less formal experience. If the students have ownership of such a change, they may be more inclined to engage with it.

## **Conclusion**

Social media use in post-primary schools is still in its infancy and despite its attractive qualities as a pedagogical aid, like all social media, it may still need to be treated with caution.. Twitter is a site used predominantly for social interaction. It is the perfect medium for students to use when relaxing or on downtime from study and therefore provides opportunities for students to engage in authentic language learning experiences. Mao (2014) reported similar positive attitudes to social media as a tool in school, with the caveat that detailed design and scaffolding needed to be provided in order to maximise the benefits of social media tools in learning.. The initial motivation for this study was to see if Twitter

could be used as a teaching and learning aid in the post-primary classroom. There is no definitive answer, as the data collected from this study has many layers and conflicting viewpoints contribute to the variability of findings. Some participants indicated positive motivations and learning outcomes whilst others were less positive. Twitter in class was not outwardly rejected but it is important to note that it was not openly accepted either. Many factors influenced this, including confidence, access to the internet during school hours, curricular pressures, and finally, the timeless human resistance to change. To say that it does not have a future in our classrooms would be incorrect. It will need to be introduced slowly and thoroughly so as to give it the recognition it deserves as a viable learning aid for the 21<sup>st</sup> century student. Also, this present study was small in scale and took place over a short period of time. This is a limitation of the study in the sense that a more protracted engagement with the use of Twitter in the classroom would have allowed for the generation of more data and perhaps even different perspectives. Due to the brevity of timescale, it is questionable how the students' knowledge of the second language was improved by this project. What this study does reveal, is that social media may hold some potential for the transformation of second-level experiences in Ireland which are currently limited by a high stakes summative examination system that sometimes pushes schools, teachers and students towards a passive, exam-oriented style of learning (Banks, McCoy and Smyth, 2018). Education in Irish schools needs to move away from the current summative exam focus and perhaps the exploration of technology enhanced methodologies may provide some direction and inspiration in this regard

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