Educational Social Media Tools: Promoting Student Investment and Language Identity in the Midst of Digital Surveillance

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Abstract

There is increasing interest in how educational technologies can be used to promote and create meaningful learning opportunities and, more specifically, how social media tools can be harnessed to encourage language learning through online interactions. Educational social media tools, however, thrust student learning from a private space into a public one and raise ethical concerns regarding digital surveillance. Drawing from Norton's (2013) conceptualisation of language investment and identity and Bourdieu's (1990) thinking tools of habitus and field, this paper explores the attitudes and experiences of 30 Japanese exchange students studying at a high school in Australia, as they engage with the educational social media platform, Edmodo. This action research study aimed to encourage language investment by providing an online space for students to develop their English language identities in and amongst their Japanese peers. However, this study found that many of the participating students resisted and/or disliked using Edmodo because they felt restricted by the platform, highlighting the need for students to have a sense of autonomy in the midst of teacher control and surveillance. Additionally, this study reveals that the students who engaged regularly, and without the prompting of the teacher, were students who were academically stronger, suggesting that students' self-efficacy is closely linked to language investment and the willingness to develop their language identity.

Keywords: Social media, surveillance, student autonomy, language investment, language identity

Introduction

While there continues to be interest in how digital literacies can be used to enhance, promote and reconceptualise teaching and learning practices, how these tools are employed and their capacity to

promote meaningful learning experiences for students warrant continued interrogation (Henderson, Selwyn, & Aston, 2017; Regan & Jesse, 2018; Selwyn, 2014). While a number of studies have explored how to incorporate digital literacies to promote English language learning (Barnes, 2017, 2018; Chang & Lu, 2018; Tour, 2019), there is still limited research in exploring how these tools can make language not only meaningful for students but promote student investment in language learning.

Additionally, the integral role that social media plays within adolescent lives (Ahn, 2011; Barnes, 2017, 2018; Erikson *et al.*, 2016) and the growing concerns regarding the use of social media and the generation of students' personal information so that it is widely available in a public space (Selwyn & Pangrazio, 2019) have created a viable market for the use of educational social media platforms. These platforms emulate the popular features of social media giant, Facebook, but are characterised by teacher surveillance. While this surveillance allows for safeguarding and/or control of the problems often associated with social media platforms, such as bullying (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014; Erikson *et al.*, 2016: Ghosh, Badillo-Urquiola, Guha, LaViola, & Wisneiwski, 2018), the shift from learning as a private space to learning as public performativity, which is tracked and observed by others, requires further investigation (Macfarlane, 2015; Regan & Jesse, 2018). This paper reports the findings from an action research project that details the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of 30 Japanese high school students studying in Australia as they engage with the educational social media platform, Edmodo. Their experiences shed light on the challenges and opportunities that are afforded by the use of social media tools to promote language learning. This study, more specifically, interrogates how digital surveillance and teacher control impact on student investment and English language identity construction.

Student Identity and Investment in Language Learning

The complex and inextricable relationship between identity and language learning has been well-documented within the literature (e.g., Shwayli & Barnes, 2018; Kaya-Aydar, 2017; Ladilova, 2015; Norton, 2016; Norton, 2013; Norton, 1995; Norton & De Costa, 2018; Norton & Early, 2011; Riley, 2007). Norton (2013) defines identity as an understanding of one's connection to the outside world and how this is then realised over time and space. Language, therefore, is positioned as a vehicle, tool and/or reflection of identity construction. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1990) thinking tools of habitus and field, which help to understand social contexts and the relationships within them by exploring how habitus, or one's "acquired, socially constituted dispositions" (p. 13), shape, and are shaped, by a particular field (e.g., English language learning in Australia). For the participating students in this study, their habitus is a site for identity construction, being shaped over time and space, as they negotiate past understandings with the present. In the context of this paper, therefore, students' past attitudes, beliefs and experiences are shaped not only by their past but are also being renegotiated within a new field, as they learn English in Australia. Bourdieu (1990) argues that the practices, and the beliefs or stances that underpin them, may differ from one individual to another yet they inescapably reflect the social context in which they are shaped and developed (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005). This, then, raises the questions as to how these students negotiate their language identities from the perspective of English as a Foreign language to English as an Additional Language perspective (as a bilingual speaker) and how this shapes not only their investment in English language learning but their interactions with their Japanese classmates in Australia.

Norton (2016) argues that access to a social network and to speakers of the target language allows individuals to claim agency and empowerment and "reframe their relationships with others in order to claim more powerful identities from which to speak" (p. 476). However, when one's social network is still primarily one that speaks Japanese, even within an Australian context, how can students reframe their identities and become more invested in language learning? Norton (2016) argues that language

learning is, conceptually, an investment rather than a motivation, as this captures the complex relationship of language learners and their desire to speak (or not to speak). The notion of investment positions the language learner not as ahistorical and unidimensional but as having a complex social history, or habitus, and being equipped with the capacity to draw upon their own agency and power. However, while Miller (1999) suggests that becoming audible in the target language is the first step in claiming membership, and/or being empowered, this study explores the constraints of audibility of English when the audience also shares your first language. Ladilova (2015) argues that the negotiation of "collective identity" or the "image that a group constructs of itself and with which the group members identify" (p. 178) is what links language and identity. However, in the context of this study, the students' investment in English is tethered to the tension between the desire to be part of the target language community, while also still wanting to claim legitimacy within their Japanese peer community. This perceived tension is what led to this action research project, in order to identify ways to promote English language learning that would allow students to claim more legitimacy as English language speakers, even amongst their Japanese peers.

Promoting Student Voice, Engagement, and Interaction through Technology

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) states that children have the right to speak freely and contribute to decisions that affect them. With this notion of student voice, there has been an increasing focus on how students are provided opportunities to engage with, and provide feedback, on decisions regarding their learning (Pearce & Wood, 2019; Finefter-Rosenbluh & Perry-Hazan, 2018; Quinn & Owen, 2016). "Student voice," however, has taken on a variety of meanings to fit varying purposes and/or school initiatives (Pearce & Wood, 2019). While perceived as promoting democratic ideals within a schooling context, student voice can be reduced to allowing students to provide a perspective on something while having little control or support in creating actual change. Pearce and Wood (2019) warn that, with the increase in neoliberal aligned school reforms, a culture of performativity is indulged with its focus on student autonomy and individual responsibility rather than providing students with a "socially transformative voice" (p. 115). With the need to not only allow students to freely express their beliefs and ideas but to also allow them to link their perspectives with action, by engaging and participating more fully in their learning, digital technologies have "disrupted traditional models of teaching and learning," as they redefine students' roles and create a conceptual shift, focusing on student participation and engagement (Manca, Grion, Armellini, & Devecchi, 2017). Social media platforms, in particular, have attracted a great deal of interest among educators and researchers as engaging spaces for learning within a schooling context (Barnes, 2017, 2018; Chang & Lu, 2018; Greenhow & Askari, 2015; Kio, 2016).

Within the context of language learning, the promotion of interaction, sharing and contribution not only promote student voice but also allow for the co-construction of knowledge and the negotiation of meaning in learning. Comas-Quinn, Mardomingo and Valentine (2009) explain that "sharing is a key activity in the co-construction of knowledge" and the rise in social media "point[s] to a previously untapped human desire for sharing" (p. 98). A student's desire to share, therefore, can be harnessed by using the target language to negotiate meaning with classmates and become audible within this online community. Chang and Lu (2018), who used a mobile-based concept map as a tool to assess English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing performance, argue that, if used deliberately as an opportunity for deeper learning, social media tools can promote students' communicative writing quality as well as social collaboration.

While the use of social media, however, has been credited as a useful tool for promoting language interaction, engagement and student voice (Barnes, 2018; Chang & Lu, 2018; Thibaut, 2015), Manca *et al*. (2017) found that, when attempting to foster student voice through a Facebook page that would

allow students to provide their perspectives on school quality and policies, students resisted the initiative. While there were several reasons, including mistrust and discomfort with school policies and skepticism about the project, the study by Manca *et al.* (2017) highlights the visibility of student voice within an online platform and the issues relating to the impact of digital surveillance on students' freedom of expression and ideas in a public space.

The Struggle for Teen Autonomy in the Midst of Digital Surveillance

Given the integral role that social media and mobile technologies now play in young people's lives (Ahn, 2011; Barnes, 2017, 2018; Erikson *et al.*, 2016), there is growing concern of the visibility of young people's private lives in these public spaces (Erikson *et al.*, 2016; Ghosh, *et al.*, 2018; Regan & Jesse, 2018; Selwyn & Pangrazio, 2019). Within the edtech industry, educational technologies have been created to "improve efficiency of educational operations" (Regan & Jesse, 2018, p. 1) and not always to transform learning. While many educational technology platforms provide a sense of privacy, given the data collected is not visible to the general public but within the "safe" haven of the educational community, there are growing ethical concerns in regard to how the large data sets collected through these platforms are used. In particular, Regan and Jesse (2018) argue that there are increasing debates regarding student privacy, as many privacy advocates suggest that these platforms are used as a surveillance tool and can be used to track and sort students.

In several studies exploring the tensions between online safety and surveillance, it was discovered that parents struggle to find a balance between ensuring their children are safe while not breaching their children's autonomy through parent surveillance and control (Erikson *et al.*, 2016; Ghosh *et al.*, 2018). Given that young people, particularly teens, have a strong sense of personal privacy when it comes to mobile devices (Ghosh *et al.*, 2018), they struggle to find a sense of autonomy when others, particularly parents, are attempting to control and continually survey their interactions. Ghosh *et al.* (2018) refer to recent research to explain that, when children interact in online spaces, they experience processes of constructing their new identities while navigating the complexities of disclosing information during interacting with others in online spaces; and, their decisions become much more complex when made "under the watchful, and often judgemental eyes of their parents" (p.2):

Ghosh *et al.* (2018) investigated the user reviews of 736 children who used mobile apps that had parental controls. They found that the majority of the participants reported that the apps were overly restrictive and invaded their privacy. In their findings, the children rarely mentioned the features of the apps but focused on how negatively these apps impacted on their lives due to their restrictive nature. The participants, however, were much more positive about the apps if they felt that apps granted them more agency or self-regulation. The authors concluded that, when designing apps that allow for online safety, teens need to have some aspect of control or agency in determining the rules for their own online safety. Drawing from both Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus and Norton's (2013) concept of investment, a young person's identity, or ways of being, as determined by both their present and past experiences, is complicated, as they attempt to develop their online identities in the presence of parent surveillance and control.

While educational social media and web-based tools may allow a unique space for the development of student voice in an educational setting (Thibaut, 2015), there are still concerns with regards to how students are able to participate fully using these tools, to develop their identities as English language speakers, with the understanding that they are being watched and judged by their peers and teachers. This paper seeks to explore how 30 Japanese exchange students invite or resist the opportunity to cultivate their English language identities using the educational social media tool, Edmodo.

Methodology

This study originated from the author's (a classroom teacher at the time of the study) awareness of a "problem" and her desire to investigate this problem to improve teaching and learning practices within her classroom. This "problem" arose from her initial experiences teaching 30 Japanese exchange students, all from a large Japanese private school, who were part of the unique program, InterCultural Education Today (ICET).

ICET was established in the early 1990's and placed Japanese high school students at different schools around Sydney, with the purpose that they would be given the opportunity to expand their worldview and study abroad. However, over time, it morphed into a High School Preparation program at *one* high school in Sydney. The 30 Japanese high school students in this study attended mainstream classes, taking subjects such as Mathematics, Business, Japanese, Health and Physical Education, while taking English and History subjects with three EAL teachers, one of these teachers being the author.

Given the teacher as researcher's (Burns, 1999) desire to bridge theory and practice and systematically collect and analyse data within her classroom to improve teaching and learning practices, an action research design was chosen. The first step in action research is to identify a problem or a problematic situation and then take deliberate actions to bring about change or improve teaching and learning practices. Consisting of a series of cycles or phases, action research involves planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, as cited in Burns, 1999, p. 7).

The teacher-researcher cycle (Freeman, 1998) comprises of six elements: (1) inquiry, (2) question/puzzle, (3) data collection, (4) data analysis, (5) understanding, and (6) making public. This project replicates Freeman's (1998) teacher-researcher cycle (see Figure 1) in order to *improve* what is already happening in the classroom, through a cyclic process of identifying the problem, inquiring, collecting and analysing data, and reflecting. This paper, therefore, describes the process of how a teacher-researcher identified, interrogated, and acted on a problem, collected and analysed the "evidence" and, then, reflected on what she had learnt from the process, before starting the process again, trying and experimenting with new approaches to the problem.
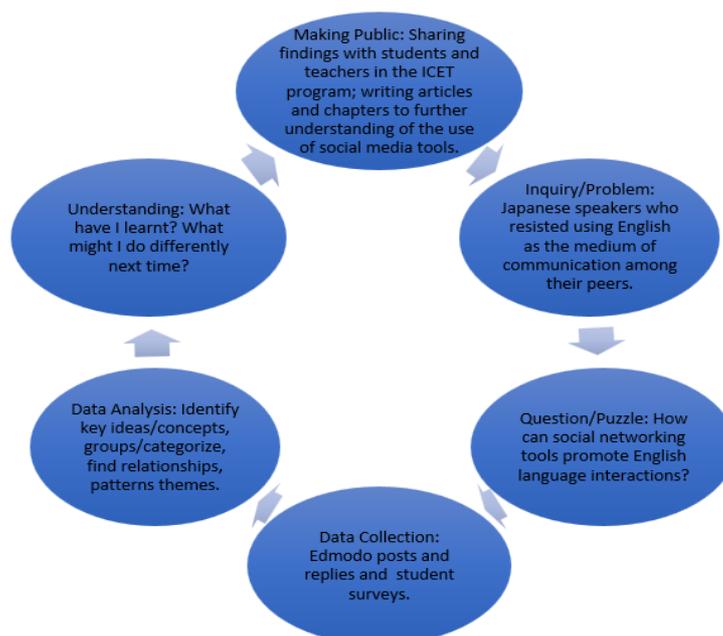

Figure 1 *The teacher-researcher cycle*

The problem

Early within the academic year, the teacher-researcher became increasingly aware of the effort required to encourage 30 Japanese high school students to speak to one another in English, as they solely communicated to one another in Japanese. This desire for them to speak in English was not due to a desire to discourage or devalue their first language or because she felt that an "English Only" policy was best but because she wanted to students' to see themselves as English speakers, even among their Japanese peers. She found that students would speak to her in English but in Japanese to their peers, and these language boundaries seemed extremely rigid. The teacher-researcher wanted to find ways to promote English language development by encouraging them to speak to one another in both English and Japanese. Given the rise in social media tools and the desire to tap into authentic ways of language communication, the teacher-researcher began to consider ways that she might incorporate social media tools, to create a space for students to share and interact and develop their English language identities. Given that their exchange program was a one year program, she felt that it was timely for them to position themselves as English language speakers within their own Japanese student community. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do the participants (30 Japanese exchange students) engage with social media platforms (e.g. for this paper, the focus is only on the platform, Edmodo)?
2. What are the participants' attitudes and experiences using this platform as a tool for developing their English language skills?

Research question 1 examines "what" happened as students interacted (or did not interact) in English and "who" was interacting. Research question 2 draws on the participants' attitudes and experiences with the platform to investigate "why" students interacted the way they did.

The plan

With the desire to encourage English language communication within their Japanese community, the plan was to use web-based technologies to provide a platform, or space, for the students to communicate in English with one another. While two web-based technologies, Edmondo and Glogster, were explored, for the purpose of the paper, only the use of Edmodo will be discussed. None of the three EAL teachers had any experience with Edmodo or other educational technologies platforms before this project. The author acknowledges that the use of social media platforms, such as Edmodo, was just one of the many options available to encourage English language interactions, however, at the time of the study, in 2012, online learning tools in education were quite novel and were actively encouraged within the school.

The plan was to prompt student interactions through Edmodo (and Glogster) at least once a week (with the exception of weeks for excursions or special study programs). While experimenting with different types of tasks for engaging students was part of the organic nature of this action research project, the author recognises that the action research project could have been strengthened if there was a more systematic approach to her reflections (e.g., conducting regular monthly reflections).

Data collection and analysis (the "evidence")

Data was collected for nine months, from February 10 to November 19, 2012, and consisted of 183 posts and 164 replies on Edmodo and a student questionnaire that was distributed at the end of August. Edmodo posts were analysed with regards to their type and participant. In defining the type of task, the analysis identified the purpose of the post (e.g. a link to a resource, a link to a PowerPoint

presentation, or a group discussion). Participation was analysed in two ways: defining who was generating the post (e.g. teacher or student) and who was replying to the post.

A student questionnaire was created by the teacher-researcher to collect qualitative data, through the use of open-ended questions, on the students' attitudes, beliefs and experiences regarding educational social media tools. The anonymous questionnaire was completed by 28 high school age students, from a class of 30 students, consisting of 17 females and 11 males. All questions were provided in Japanese and English; however, responses were predominantly in Japanese. The responses were translated and the data were then analysed by categorising and identifying key themes found among the responses, such as benefits, drawbacks, accessibility, and engagement.

Results

The analysis of the findings, or the fourth element of the teacher-researcher cycle, is presented through the exploration of two key aspects that directly relate to the two research questions: 1) the interactions that occurred within the online platform, answering research question one—the "what," and 2) the students' perceptions on their experiences with the platform—the "why."

Edmodo posts and replies

The analysis of the Edmodo posts and replies details not only the purpose of the post (e.g. activity type) but "who" generated the post and replied. Understanding "what" occurred within this online space allows for the interrogation of how the participants are negotiating their English language identities and how this might be manifested through their engagement within this space. It is important to note that there are two functions discussed in this paper—posts and replies. The teacher and/or students can create an individual post, which then allows students to reply, or interact, with the original post.

The first post on Edmodo occurred on February 10, 2012, by a student using an Edmodo post as a platform for answering a prompt given by the teacher *in* class ("What will you do this weekend?"). The student's post is then followed by 22 individual student posts that responded to the teacher's prompt (not the initial student's post). In class, the teacher requested that the students respond, in English, to the prompt on Edmodo, as a starting point for the students to navigate the online platform. There was no induction on the platform or explicit instructions, as the teacher envisioned that students could explore the platform on their own and that they might take an opportunity to take increasing ownership of the platform. However, of the 23 posts on this first day, only 2 of the 47 replies were exchanges between students. The remaining 45 replies consisted of exchanges between the teacher-researcher and students. For example, the teacher replies to a student post and then the student replies back to the teacher, resulting in 2 replies. Therefore, similar to the classroom, all English language interactions were between the teacher and students, not peer to peer.

Over the course of the nine months using Edmodo, there were 183 posts and 164 replies. Of the 183 posts, 73% (n=134) of the tasks were given by the teacher as an in-class activity or as homework and required a response in the form of a post, a presentation or a completed online poster (using the program, Glogster). Of these 134 tasks, 65% (n=53) were a response to a teacher prompt and the replies were primarily from the teacher but, occasionally, the tasks would elicit a response from one of five students who would, occasionally, comment on posts, responding to peers, without being explicitly "instructed" by the teacher to do so.

The teacher prompted in-class activity or homework that consisted of 73% (n = 134) of the posts, as can be seen in Figure 2, included the following activity types:

- Teacher discussion prompts: 53 posts,
- Online posters using "Glogster": 32 posts,
- PowerPoint group presentations: 8 posts,
- "Guess this place" activity (students described a place and their peers had to guess what place they had described): 15 posts, and
- Letter writing: 26 posts

The four remaining activity types consisted of 20% (n = 37) student-led discussions, 2% (n = 4) of teacher-generated polls, quizzes and links, which primarily focused on grammar practice, and 4% (n=8) unprompted student posts.
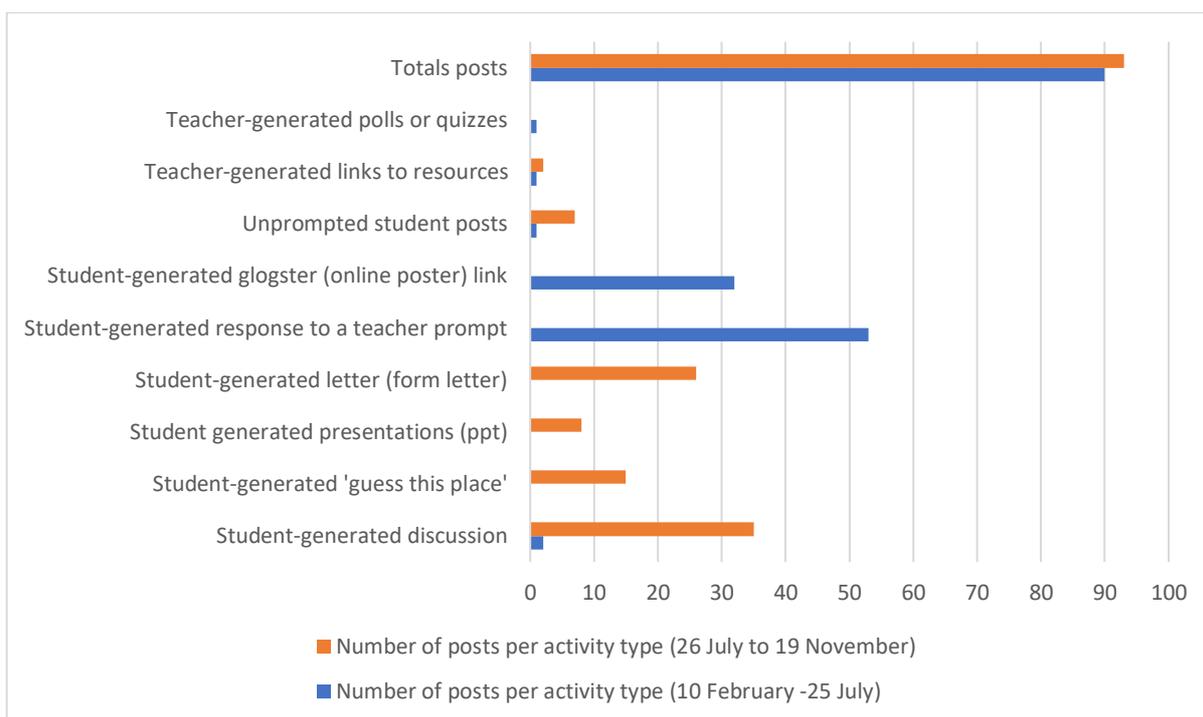

Figure 2 *Number of posts per activity type. This figure illustrates the number of teacher or student posts (not replies) per activity type in the first and second half of the year.*

The majority of data collected from the first half of the year reveals that almost all of the posts (even though they were student-generated) were controlled by and dictated by the teacher-researcher at the beginning of this study. In the process of reflecting on the types of activities employed, the teacher-researcher recognised the new problem – the lack of student replies – which gave way to the start of a new action research cycle. Up until mid-July, most replies to a student-generated post consisted of a maximum of two student replies. In order to experiment with ways to encourage more student replies, the teacher-researcher decided to institute several new activity types, including "Guess this place," where students would desribe a place and others had to guess what place they were referring to, and group PowerPoint presentations (on a research project) that were uploaded to Edmodo to be viewed by others. Finally, student discussions, where students were to create their own discussion questions and lead a conversation on Edmodo with their peers (e.g., student-led discussion), were employed to provide students more autonomy to choose the topic and guide the interactions among their peers. Each week, two students were asked to lead their own discussion on their topic of choice. The teacher outlined some guidelines for the student-led discussion questions, such as ensuring that the topic was something to which every student could contribute, the topic was appropriate for a classroom context

and the question was open-ended and allowed students to provide different perspectives. While most students created their discussion prompt with limited scaffolding from the teacher, some did ask for additional feedback to ensure that the prompt was an appropriate topic and/or grammatically correct. Ten of these student-led discussions had over 20 replies, with only six out of the 37 student-led discussions having under ten replies from peers.

For example, on August 24, 2012, one student posted this student-led prompt:

> *Why are you here (in Aus.) except to study English?*

This post, which resulted in 25 peer replies, not only had students giving their responses but also commenting on others, with questions and encouragement. There was no teacher response.

A significant finding was that only 4% (n=8) of the total of 183 posts over the academic year were completely unprompted. While the student-led discussions encouraged more student replies, this was viewed as a task that they were required to complete (though it was never assessed) and, therefore, students were compelled to complete it, more likely, out of obligation rather than desire. Of these unprompted student-generated posts, one was another student logging onto another student's Edmodo page and writing, "I am smart," prompting 11 replies from peers and providing most of the class with a good laugh. Other questions asked were:

> *What is the homework?*
> *Why can Australian students use bad words in class and we can't?*

The homework question shows the platform being used as a tool for communication with peers in English, however, the second question assumes teacher surveillance, desiring the attention of the teacher, given previous discussions about classroom expectations regarding the use of inappropriate language. Three unprompted posts were reflective in nature, expressing and communicating two different students' unprompted thoughts and ideas. However, these reflective thoughts and ideas had no student replies, only a response from the teacher. On 18 September, one student posted:

> *Although I finished listening in IELTS, I think my skill of listening has not been proving. Is my English skill weaker than before? Of course, I really need to study more and more. That is my wall that I need to break down. I have no time to finish this year.*

All, but one, of the unprompted responses were posted in the second half of the year, which may indicate that these students felt that they could reflect and discuss issues in English with their peers within this online community, however, most students still hesitated to reply back to these reflections.

Student perceptions: Their beliefs and experiences regarding their use of Edmodo

While only 28 of the 30 students completed the survey, given that two students were away at the time the survey was distributed, all 28 students expressed the integral role that social media played in their lives. With half of the students using Facebook and Twitter every day and the remaining reporting that they used these platforms several times a week, their attitudes towards using Edmodo, an educational social media platform, was very different from their "need" and/or "desire" to use other social media platforms. The survey revealed that, while all students felt that social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, proferred a number of benefits, half of the students felt that Edmodo was limited and was not beneficial for their English language development. Those, however, who felt that Edmodo was valuable argued that they could share their knowledge with others, discuss topics with friends, learn

from others and improve their IT literacy, all while developing English language skills.

One main reason why several students (n=9) disliked the platform and claimed that it was not beneficial was due to their limited access to computers. ICET had a policy that prohibited students from owning and/or using a personal computer and they could only have access to the school computers during class and set times after school. This policy was put into place as many students in previous years, who were staying with a host family, had spent an inordinate amount of time outside of school hours in their rooms playing video games. Given the introduction of this policy, three students explicitly stated that using social media tools was not "fair" when they had limited access to computers. One student commented, "It is not fair to be encouraged to use when there is not sufficient PC environment." This highlights the students' frustrations with their lack of autonomy in this situation.

Another reason for the students' dislike of using Edmodo was their perceived limitation of its functions. For example, one student argued that he/she could not make comments in Edmodo, even though it followed the same format of posts and replies as Facebook. Another student commented that they disliked not being able to upload videos in Edmodo, which in fact you can. This again raises the issue that students and, therefore, the teacher, needed to clearly understand the features of these tools and students needed time to experiment with them.

An issue that was highlighted by several students was the visibility of their language ability in a "public" space. One student expressed apprehension of other students seeing what he/she had posted and judging his/her English ability. This fear of judgment on their language performance inevitably created interactions within the online platform that focused primarily on accuracy rather than being used as a tool for more fluent and unprompted interaction.

Discussion

Teacher control versus student autonomy

The survey data suggests that, while students actively use social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, when these tools are replicated for learning purposes and under the watchful eyes of their teacher, there is some resistance. While Edmodo provided a platform to share and interact in English with their classmates, the platform, itself, felt restrictive to students. In many ways, their habitus became a site of struggle, as they attempted to construct their English language identities while negotiating the visibility of their investment and engagement. Similar to Ghosh *et al.*'s (2018) findings on parent control and surveillance of mobile apps, the students in this study were under the watchful and, potentially judgemental, eyes of not only their teachers but their peers. Many students commented that the use of Edmodo was unfair, given that they did not have access to personal computers, however, students were given ample time in class and after school to use the program. This suggests that the *restriction* of not being able to use personal computers added to their negative views about the use of an educational social media tool, aligning with Ghosh *et al.*'s (2018) findings, in which most of their participants' reviews focused on the restriction of the Apps rather than their functionality.

The findings from this study suggest that allowing an online space to share ideas and interact was much less empowering and much more daunting for students than anticipated. In Manca and Grion's (2017) study they found that just providing a space for students to voice their ideas does not mean that students feel safe or comfortable providing their ideas in front of a public audience, where their ideas are tracked and recorded by not only teachers but other students. Students were restricted by the continual surveillance of others. Given that there are complexities when the desire for young people to develop their newly constructed online identities are met with controls and restrictions (Ghosh *et*

al., 2018), this might suggest a similar tension as occurs when students attempt to develop their English language identities but with the added complexity of visibility to teachers and peers. Macfarlane (2015) argues that, within a culture of performativity, online spaces take learning from a public endeavour to a public one, allowing everyone to view and judge one another's performances. This, therefore, can potentially create a space where students are disempowered by the surveillance of others rather than empowered to develop their language skills and further cultivate their language identities.

While the purpose of this study was to encourage English language interactions within an online space, the teacher-researcher quickly realised that the interactions were primarily controlled and shaped by her. Even with the introduction of student-led discussions in the second half of the year, students still wanted feedback on their discussion questions and were worried about language accuracy. This study sheds light on the tensions between allowing students a space to interact, where they can share and become "audible" and legitimate members, while also ensuring that these interactions are educative, which assumes some sense of involvement from the teacher.

Self-efficacy, language identity and investment

In allowing students to share and interact in English with their Japanese peers, there is an opportunity for them to solidify their English language identities, which has a direct link to their investment in language learning (Shwayli & Barnes, 2018; Ladilova, 2015; Norton, 2016). However, as discussed above, it can be problematic to allow students to cultivate their language identity under the surveillance of teachers and peers. Interestingly, this study found that five of the 30 participating students posted and/or replied to posts in Edmodo without being instructed to do so. In particular, two of these students used the platform to ask questions, reflect, and invite discussion that was not always directed at the teacher but the rest of the class. These five students were the strongest, academically, in the class and, in their formal assessments, demonstrated a stronger proficiency in English than their peers. This suggests that students' language identity and, therefore, their investment in English, as evidenced in the engagement with this platform, is related to their self-efficacy.

While an investment in English language learning can be an empowering tool for an individual to claim legitimacy within an English language community (Shwayli & Barnes, 2018), an individual's belief about his or her capability to perform, or his or her self-efficacy, has a direct impact on their motivation to participate (Bandura, 2012). A number of studies found that students with stronger self-efficacy beliefs sought, chose and employed more strategies that resulted in improvement and/or stronger academic performance (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007; Sardegna, 2012; Yang, 1999). It is not surprising, therefore, that the students in this study with stronger language proficiency chose to engage and interact with the online platform more than others. Their self-efficacy drove their desire to find opportunities to improve, and these opportunities, in return, resulted in continued academic engagement and performance.

Conclusion

While the literature suggests that social media tools and digital technologies, more broadly, can be valuable tools for promoting language development and investment (Barnes, 2018; Chang & Lu, 2018; Tour, 2019), there is still more research needed to further interrogate how best to employ these tools to create meaningful language learning opportunities. As evidenced by this action research study, there are opportunities to problematise, plan, collect and reflect on ways to harness these powerful tools. This study is limited not only by its very specific context but given the author did not engage in monthly reflections, there was an opportunity missed to document the problems and solutions in a more systematic way. This study, which was conducted in 2012, while seemingly outdated still holds

relevance now, particularly as we, as educators, continue to navigate how to effectively use social media tools to promote meaningful learning opportunities while balancing student autonomy and teacher control, as well as encourage all students to cultivate their English language identities by promoting stronger self-efficacy strategies.

This study highlights that, when using educational technologies, such as Edmodo, students need to feel as if they are empowered by these tools rather than restricted by them. This includes ensuring that students a) have fair and equal access to these tools, b) clearly understand the functionality of the platform, and c) feel as if they are active agents within the platform, rather than passive participants. To encourage student voice, there needs to be opportunities for students to take on more ownership and autonomy within the platform, even in the midst of teacher surveillance.

Additionally, this study sheds light on the relationship between students' self-efficacy and how this is realised within their online interactions. Teachers and researchers need to continue to explore how to best equip students with self-efficacy strategies and provide opportunities for students to feel "safe" within a more public learning space, encouraging students to cultivate their language identities without feeling burdened by the watchful eyes of teachers and peers.

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