Teaching Social Media through Metaphor

Newcomers to Canada that enroll in ELSA (English Language Services for Adults) are faced with overcoming language barriers, maintaining engagement in a curriculum developed to foster useful tools for immigrants to Canada, and navigating their own preference in how they learn and how education is practiced in the Canadian context. The cognitive tool of metaphor (as understood in Kieran Egan’s framework of Imaginative Education (IE)) will be utilized within an ELSA classroom of 16 learners to attempt to create engagement within these adult learners to surmount these challenges. Though IE is focused more on young learners, this theory will be applied (through the cognitive tool of metaphor) to teach the concept of Twitter. This Action Research (AR) will explore the use of metaphor within this ELSA context. The metaphor of a cocktail party will explicitly be used to mediate core concepts of Twitter (follow, unfollow, tweet, and etc.) to these adult newcomers who are simultaneously learning Canadian culture and the English language. Increased engagement did seem to be realized through utilizing metaphor as well as the apparent shifting of attitude of at least one student with this unfamiliar learning method. Focus on using student generated metaphor, aside from the cocktail metaphor provided, is one aspect that needed to be further developed and were beyond the scope of this current AR.

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WHAT IS ACTION RESEARCH

According to Koshy AR has become increasingly popular in the last few years (Koshy, 2005). This report is AR. But what is AR? I can easily tell you what it isn’t. It isn’t the traditionally thought of empirical and quantitative research that adds to humanity’s body of knowledge that can be used in any context in any part of the world. It isn’t knowledge gleamed by academics solely for academics. Yet it does have empirical and quantitative data, at least some of the time. And it does add to the collective body of knowledge, if not in a universality applicable way. And it is done by academics, if not necessarily for academic peers exclusively. After reading Koshy’s book on AR and doing my own due diligence on the topic, I have come to the conclusion that AR is research for the researcher. It is research for the researcher’s context, the researcher’s practice, and the researcher’s benefit. Yes, other educators, academics and laymen will learn from another’s AR (maybe they will learn only a little, maybe they will learn a lot), but that really isn’t the purpose of AR. AR is to help the researcher learn something that will help them in their own practice. It is research for professional develop. It is research to go into depth with one’s own context in a manner that will make the researcher “better” in their individual practice. This form of
“betterment” may not actually turn out to be what the researcher intended or imagined. But it is through the process of AR that something meaningful is generated for the one doing the AR. AR is personal. It is a personal academic journey and not necessarily a quest for knowledge for the “betterment” of academia as a whole. But don’t let that fool you into thinking AR is just a journal of someone’s practice within a classroom. It has purpose. It has structure. When done well, it is academically rigorous and demanding. It is research that is revisited, reworked and constantly evolving as it is ongoing. To judge the value of a person’s AR is akin to judging a work of art. Some will see value; others will just see paint thrown onto canvas or random objects mashed together. When one creates something, be it AR or a piece of art, one hopes that those consuming their creation see value in their work. Let us hope that after reading my AR you see the value and not the random collection of objects thrown together. But let us be clear, the true value of my AR will only truly be seen by the personal transformation of my practice within my context. And how can one truly judge these things?

RESEARCH INTERESTS

I am an adult English-as-a-second-language (ESL) educator within a public school district, but my students are mature students and newcomers to Canada who have to deal with a slew of challenges that may be outside the norm of other ESL classrooms. Potential culture shock, while trying to learn Canadian culture and the English language, all without the support of a familiar comfortable setting amongst pressure to provide for family members are just some of these challenges. It is in this environment that I am mandated to teach these newcomers the English language in tandem with language benchmarks (ability with the language) geared toward skills that newcomers would need in order to be successful in Canada. My biggest challenge is to balance the needs of the students in learning the language and the skills in the language benchmarks within the framework of the content in the curriculum (focused on Canadian culture) to the diversity of the students’ backgrounds (cultural and socio-economical) and the potential fossilization of learners’ learning style1 that has developed over the course of the learner’s life and their own education experience. These learners can be highly motivated to gain the skills (language and benchmarks) due to a very real desire to improve and be successful in Canada. But some of them have very defined ideas on what they need and if the lesson/benchmark focuses on something they don’t

1 This fossilization has been observed informally in my class with regards to mature learners and their preference and expectation to have a teacher teach and students listen as a pedagogy.
believe is valuable, they lose interest and engagement. I am interested in trying to create engagement and find a way to help adult learners learn computer skills (especially if there is a big lack of understanding or an inherent fear of computers, which is sometimes found in mature students). From my personal experience teaching computer literacy classes (which had native speakers and non-native speakers) this fear was present in every student to some degree. It is actually through the teaching of this class of mature students that I first encountered this fear that manifested itself in a crippling way that prevented student retention of computer skill concepts. Ideally this AR will transcend my current ESL practice and will allow for a better way of teaching (both in my everyday practice and when I revisit computer literacy in the future).

The biggest challenge I would like to address within an IE framework in this context is the continual engagement of students with a curriculum that they may not see as valuable while attempting to transcend the fossilization of adult learners’ style of acquiring knowledge. While doing this I hope to overcome cultural and language barriers as well as differences in learning concepts.

1. Overcoming language barrier in mediating a concept
2. Overcoming student disengagement in content that is seen as not as valuable as other knowledge
3. Overcoming fossilization of adult learners’ style of learning

I will be teaching a technology unit in my class. The social network Twitter will be the concept I will be focusing on.

So how does one overcome potential barriers in understanding from cultural diversity, fossilized learning practices and internal self-made tentativeness to learn certain topics within a framework of IE? Hopefully this will happen through metaphor. Throughout my coursework I have been very interested in finding a universal mediator that can be applied to all learners from all cultures. Through my study of Vygotsky, and through my own attempts at utilizing different metaphors with my students, I have been grudgingly convinced that there really isn’t a culturally universal mediator. But there are mediators that have high levels of affordances in many, if not all,
cultures (Vygotsky, 1986). Metaphor is one such mediator, and by this I also mean an IE cognitive tool,² that I believe has a high level of ability to mediate concepts and knowledge across the diverse backgrounds of students.

The coursework I have completed with regards to IE has so far has given me a good grounding in the use of metaphor as a cognitive tool within a Mythic framework. This Mythic framework has a collection of cognitive tools based on oral language (Egan, An imaginative approach to teaching, 2005). This theory is discussed further in the next section titled: Background Literature. The various assignments and lessons that I have worked on within this framework has given me a deeper understanding of the potential stumbling blocks in using metaphor extensively with native and non-native English students. A few of the challenges are that some students inevitably take the metaphor too far and focus on the nuances that don’t directly connect to the concept while other students look at it at too surface of a level of understanding. Also I have discovered that nothing beats a well thought-out and developed metaphor. If it is hastily created there can be many challenges to understanding due to the lack of appropriateness of the metaphor in fitting within the topic. My goal when researching background material was to have a better understanding of what other educators have done with metaphor in their classrooms and lessons as well as discovering any potential stumbling blocks for mature and ESL students (above and beyond what I have discovered in my own practice). So far I have only looked at metaphor in teaching through an IE standpoint and I will continue to use this IE perspective for my AR.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

From the literature I have studied I have found a surprising amount on metaphor as a pedagogical tool in teaching learners with a similar background as that of my students.³ Asides from the IE use of metaphor within Kieran Eagan’s work, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs, I discovered some studies that reflected around metaphor being used to teach concepts.

Kieran Egan’s theory of IE draws upon metaphor as a tool that when used within the framework of his theory creates a powerful way to engage students with their learning (Egan, 1997). Egan and his recent development of

² Metaphor as a cognitive tool found in Kieran Egan’s theory will be elaborated further in the following paragraphs.
³ This may not be surprising for the reader, but for myself and throughout my practice as an educator, I have never really encountered much in the use of metaphor to teach computer concepts or ESL learners.
Learning in Depth (LiD) was created in part from his earlier work on trying to engage student imagination. This earlier work focused on engaging student imagination through the use of cognitive tools found within different “kinds of understanding.” His goal was to re-conceive and reconceptualise education. The result was his “kinds of understanding”: Somatic, Mythic, Romantic, Philosophic and Ironic. These “kinds of understanding” have become the foundation for imaginative education theory and an imaginative approach to learning. These “kinds of understandings” represent a group of cognitive tools based on language. Cognitive tools, as defined by Egan, are: “Aids to thinking developed in human cultural history and learned by people today to enlarge their powers to think and understand” (Egan K., An imaginative approach to teaching, 2005). Mastery of these tools are not linear and one could have a high level of use of a tool from one kind of understanding while being situated in another kind of understanding. Going further in depth with Egan’s theory is not the purpose of this AR, but suffice it to say that metaphor falls within Mythic understanding which is based on oral language and incorporates tools like story, metaphor and a sense of mystery. My study focuses on using metaphor as a cognitive tool that falls in line with Egan’s IE theory but takes on a more Vygotskian flavour through its use in mediation.

Vygotskian theory seems to line up with many of Egan’s concepts with regards to cognitive tools, but it diverges in some fundamental areas, most notably with Egan’s LiD. 4 Focusing on a comparison is also not the purpose of my AR, but looking at Vygotsky’s work helps to flesh out my intended use of metaphor in my AR. I will gravitate towards Vygotsky’s idea of mediation of concepts with regards to metaphor to highlight this use. According to Vygotsky, in order to develop concepts, spontaneous or scientific, there has to be some mediation of meaning. This mediation is seen as something that happens indirectly, even though it can be explicitly used. One point to note is that mediation is very contextual and according to Vygotsky is always culturally bound to some degree. Cultural tools (something as simple as eye contact to express the meaning of focused attention and respect in Western culture) and cognitive tools (such as metaphors or seeing concepts in the form of binary opposites) are forms of mediation. These tools are in fact mediators of meaning. Vygotsky does not separate mediators into cultural and cognitive tools. For Vygotsky they are the one and the same. He believes that there are NO universal mediators and that all mediators are situated in a cultural context and cannot be applied

4 I wrote a previous Vygotsky graduate paper to address many of the similarities and contradictions found when comparing these two pedagogies.
IE uses extensive mediation and is of a Vygotskyian nature. This mediation is an integral part of fostering and engaging imagination through the use of the cognitive tools in the “kinds of understanding.” The teacher has a responsibility, when prescribing to this type of teaching, to explicitly use these tools in their lessons to maximize the potential for student use of imagination and engagement. It is through using these tools, to convey meaning and knowledge, that mediation is consistently occurring. It is THIS idea of metaphor as a cognitive tool and tool for mediation that I explicitly utilize in my AR to teach the social media concept of Twitter.

With this idea of metaphor and mediation I searched for other work that delved into its use in teaching computer concepts. What I found was a study that looked into using the metaphor of an African village’s everyday items to teach basic computer interface (Obono, 2009). This study looked at the suitability of using this African village metaphor (and the symbols that are commonly found in African villages as icons for various basic computer tasks such as saving a document, or sending an email) over the traditional metaphor of the computer interface being an office to explain computer tasks. Their goal was to find a better way to mediate simple computer tasks via desktop icons that were more familiar to a specific cultural group (South Africans). Various common items from a traditional African village replaced the “save disk” icon and the “e-mail” icon to mediate these concepts to South Africans that may not be familiar with office work or office tasks. What was found was that in order to be truly effective, a teaching metaphor needs to be situated within a learner’s cultural experience and orientated to their cultural background. Any metaphor used to teach a concept has to be strongly grounded within the target audience’s culture (Obono, 2009). This study also highlighted the ineffectiveness of using unfamiliar metaphors with diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

I was hoping to find that using metaphor to mediate a computer concept will allow my students to learn a concept more effectively (or at the least in a meaningful manner!). I had a hunch that the topic itself, Twitter, will be engaging, as well as the various activities around it. I thought that the students will have a better
understanding of some concepts of Twitter (following, unfollowing, short tweets\textsuperscript{5}, etc.) and through the metaphor may have felt a little bit more at ease with using computers and social media. The hope was to allow them to utilize Twitter as a powerful tool for their own learning.

\textbf{CLASS ACTIVITIES}

As mentioned, my learners are from a diverse background of cultures. There were 14 consistent participants that varied from different social-economic backgrounds (a few were refugees, some were housewives, others were doctors or highly trained professionals) and a diverse back ground of nationalities (Iranian, Taiwanese, Polish, Chinese, Russian, Korean and Iraqi). Through the process of my class and AR we had several core activities that were scaffolded and engineered to fully develop a metaphor that could be used to teach Twitter. The purpose of many of these activities was to provide learners with a suitable metaphor to mediate Twitter concepts and to potentially have students develop a personal culturally-orientated metaphor that could provide easier mediation than the one provided by myself. The metaphor I selected was that of a cocktail party to mediate the concept of Twitter. The challenge I had was to create an understanding of a cocktail party with students that may have had no cultural connection to such an event. The initial activities were to develop this idea and to start students creating work that could be easily transferred into tweets in Twitter. While these were occurring I also tried to simultaneously allow students to create their own similar cultural event that mirrored a cocktail party. My goal was to allow students to have a more culturally-orientated event to potentially understand Twitter. What followed these initial activities was an explicit mediation of the concept of Twitter and of Twitter-based tasks through the use of metaphor before actually jumping in and actively utilizing Twitter. Continued use of Twitter was encouraged in future activities which allowed students to further develop their understanding and skill with this form of social media. These activities took place in a 3 week span within a mixed-use refurbished elementary school in Coquitlam BC.

We started with oral presentations of topics that were chosen by the student. Students were required to present in front of the class for 7 minutes on any topic they were interested in. The students that were not presenting were required to listen attentively and provide structured feedback to the presenter. They were also

\textsuperscript{5} A tweet is a short post on Twitter that has a maximum of 140 characters.
required to write one sentence down on an interesting fact they heard from the presentation. For example one student from Iraq did his presentation on the date tree. This tree has great cultural significance in Iraq (it is even on their currency). A student listening to his presentation wrote down the sentence: “20 million date trees were cut down during the Iraqi war.” A sentence like this was to be the basis for future interesting nuggets of conversation one might find at a cocktail party and were to further be used for tweets when Twitter was eventually focused on.

The next activity was to introduce the concept of a cocktail party. This event had multiply pedagogical purposes and was also used to further develop a student’s ability to perform small talk and professional networking. The students were required to be in groups of three or more and were asked to change groups every 7 minutes while trying to listen and contribute to the group’s conversation by producing short pieces of information (like the sentences from fellow student’s presentations), an elevator pitch\(^6\) where necessary, as well as general small talk. Students were only able to freely mingle after 3 rounds of 7 minutes within different groups. The idea was that when students freely mingled they would follow people they felt were interesting. This was not a true cocktail party, but there was food and non-alcoholic drinks. All chairs were removed to allow for better freedom of movement and a more authentic cocktail party atmosphere. Administration was invited to attend (and some did) to create celebrity attendees that student would potentially talk or listen to. Before students left they were required to mark on a list the participant who they found the most interesting. The main goal was to familiarize students with a cocktail party type event to be used at a future date to teach Twitter.

After the cocktail party the students were required to write a comparison essay. This essay was to compare the cocktail party (as they understood it) with a similar event from their native culture. First they had to create a Venn Diagram to have a graphic outline of their comparison. After they completed this they were free to write their comparison. I had VERY high hopes that this would produce events that would be culturally orientated to specific learners’ native culture to be used to teach Twitter if my cocktail party wasn’t fully understood. This desire stemmed from the study on the African village metaphor revealing that culturally oriented metaphors are

\(^6\) This elevator pitch was developed by students to be a 30 second “pitch” to sell oneself when at a networking event.
superior to teach concepts with targeted audiences. Alas this was to be my biggest disappointment and will be described later.

With the comparison complete I then utilized the cocktail party event to mediate the concept of Twitter. Utilizing handouts I explained Twitter as a type of 24 hour cocktail party were people were free to follow interesting people and hear what they had to say as well as have their own followers listening to what they had to say too. The emphasis was that, like a cocktail party, the goal is to say interesting nuggets of information that people would want to listen to and therefore follow you. I use the selected “interesting people” from the earlier cocktail party event as examples of whom you might want to follow. From here I jumped into how to create an account and how to start searching for interesting people to follow. The initial activity was to listen to people and not actively “say” anything… just like when you first come to a cocktail party you may want to survey who is there before putting yourself in a position to comment and talk with those at the party.

Further activities and lessons were implemented to teach students the # and @ concepts in Twitter with a constant revisiting of the cocktail event whenever it was appropriate to mediate these concepts. Tweets started to be tweeted and the # thread (#elsa6) was created to allow students to easily follow the activity of fellow students. You can still search #elsa6 on Twitter to see what students produced. At the time of writing no one else had used this #. These tweets were further incorporated in class as a tool to summarize what was learned in class. I consciously tried to create time for Twitter every day.

It was through these activities and lessons I hoped to see the effectiveness of using metaphor to mediate a computer social media concept across cultural and language barriers while furthering engagement. The presentations were an attempt to generate information nuggets to be later used as tweets, while the cocktail party event was an attempt to familiarize students with this event to use it later as a high level affordance metaphor to teach Twitter. The comparison essay was implemented to allow the students to focus on an event that could be used as a metaphor for Twitter which was potentially more personally and culturally orientated to the individual learner. The actual teaching of Twitter constantly revolved around explaining and mediating Twitter concepts through the metaphor of a cocktail party.
As with any plan, unforeseen results and outcomes so occur. Due to the organic nature of AR, my activities and lessons changed to reflect these unexpected outcomes. The biggest change I found when conducting my AR was when the students attempted to create their own event that was supposed to be similar to that of a cocktail party. This did not occur how I hoped and modified how I original envisioned students being introduced to Twitter. I also had some very real reluctance to use Twitter that also produced an unexpected outcome.

**UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES**

I was more than slightly put off when I had tried to make the transition of, “Hey here is the event: A cocktail party,” to “Hey! Here is Twitter… it’s like a cocktail party… but not really.” The idea was to teach the concept of Twitter within the now familiar setting of the cocktail party. I felt confident that I explained the cocktail party (and the students actively did the event) in a manner that allowed for an easy connection to the Twitter concepts of following, unfollowing, tweeting, etc. But I felt nervous. The student’s written comparison of the cocktail party they experienced to a personal cultural event didn’t produce student generated events that would lend easily to a teachable culturally relevant metaphor for Twitter. Many of them ended up being a comparison of a wedding, which focused on gifts and food, and a cocktail party. It was at this stage I felt forced to use only my metaphor of a cocktail party (which some of them had just learnt in my highly structured networking event of a mock classroom cocktail party) to understand Twitter. Originally I had wanted students to compare their events to the cocktail party in discussion groups then make the leap to Twitter. Unfortunately I didn’t teach it this way and it turned into a bit of an unimaginative lesson. I had a handout that they read while I explained the idea of Twitter through the metaphor of a cocktail party. I then went through some of the vocabulary (tweet, follow, @, #, etc.) and transferred these ideas into the metaphor and vice versa. There was a lot of teacher talking (where I wanted students to talk!) and a lot of students staring blankly at the teacher. I actually started to feel rather self-conscious and shy (something I usually don’t feel when teaching my class) but I soldiered on.

Unfortunately I taught my students the word “blush” the previous day and I mentioned that I used to blush profusely when I was younger and that it was a trait in my family. I also told them it was a trait that I now have, more or less, under control. One student, Anju, in the middle of my rambling about cocktail parties, metaphors and Twitter interrupted me and said, “Can I tell you something?” I was actually a little relieved to have
a student say something and replied, “Sure.” She responded… “Your face is all red; you’re blushing as you talk!” I was a bit mortified and embarrassed. I had been feeling like I was losing the students’ interest and that they were not engaged (remember, I wasn’t teaching the concept in what I thought was a very engaging manner. I had hoped to use their cultural events as metaphors…) but I HAD to teach Twitter and connect it to a cocktail party or the rest of the activities and my AR would be meaningless! I took my student’s comment in stride (though I am sure I blushed more and mumbled something about the heat in the room… It WAS hot that day in the class) and managed to finish the basics of Twitter to get them to go and sign up for an account. I was a little off kilter for the rest of the day’s activities. It wasn’t a pleasant experience… but it made me reflect on what went well and what didn’t. Looking back I definitely would try to develop the student’s cultural events more to make them (hopefully) more in line with a metaphor that could be used to mediate Twitter.

Interestingly enough Anju refused to make a Twitter account on that first day. I think SHE was so far from being engaged that she thought it was a useless skill/activity to pursue (This was exactly what I was trying to combat with the use of metaphor as a form of mediation). Or maybe she just liked being able to be different. She came from a very strict and traditional education system (India) where she was always suppose to follow the teacher’s instruction and was allowed very little autonomy in her own learning. So throughout the next 40 minutes as other students created their accounts and started to actively engage in the metaphor of a cocktail party by following interesting people on Twitter, Anju sat and practiced her listening on an online website. I don’t think she was too bothered that I was trying to get people on Twitter to potentially practice their English via tweets. Maybe she felt unimpressed or superior that she wasn’t doing this “silly” activity. She left early from class that day saying that she needed to pick up her daughter and go catch the bus…

We continued with Twitter the next day (Anju was noticeably absent). Momentum started building as we actively followed each other and the class account (@Elsa610) while tweeting with #s and @s. Excitement seemed to be building for Twitter and some students used their lunchtime to tweet about anything and everything under the sun. When Anju returned the next day and we went to the lab to tweet about a topic that we had just learned in class (the invention of the toaster). I think she was a bit taken aback by the obvious excitement for Twitter that some students showed. I came to her and said, “Here are your headphones for some listening practice as I know
you don’t want to use Twitter.” Anju actually declined them and said she wanted to create an account. Maybe she wanted to see what all the fuss was about or maybe she was feeling left out. I don’t know, but I was thrilled that she had changed her mind. It honestly felt like a success on my part to be going from my embarrassment and Anju’s obvious disengagement during the initial set up stages to her willing participation. Now I don’t really know what she was feeling that day. Maybe she felt left out, maybe she felt isolated, or maybe she was generally interested in Twitter… Heck it could have been Ellen DeGeneres’s Oscar selfie that had been tweeted millions of times the day before! What I can say is that it made me feel rather vindicated that she had changed her mind. It felt like a good moment after my tanking the delivery of Twitter for this student. Metaphorically speaking.

THE DOCUMENTED PROCESS

Getting permission to collect data on my students was relatively easy due to the fact that my students are all adults. The only challenge came in explaining the consent form as some of the vocabulary was academic. Only two of my students chose to not give their consent. I had them participate, but have removed their results and their data from my AR.

I utilized several data collection instruments to document my AR. Online unit questionnaires were produced for pre and post data using http://fluidsurvey.com. Quick formal observations were outlined and implemented during the cocktail party and subsequent Twitter activities. An AR journal was also written to capture the trials and tribulations of my evolving AR. Student’s work, from the comparison essays to actually tweets, was also collected for analysis. I followed this up with some informal class discussions with students regarding their participation.

For the pre unit questionnaire I focused on questions that would potentially allow me to gauge where the students were with their understanding of social media as well as develop a base line to revisit after the activity was completed.

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7 She abruptly left the class the following week before my AR was concluded and before I could ask her what changed her mind.
Sliding bars were used to represent where a student lies on a spectrum using a numerical value (0 on the left, indicating a negative answer, and 100 on the right to indicate a positive answer. The higher the number the student selected, the more positive the answer.) were used in the majority of questions while students also had to check boxes to answer others. The post unit questionnaire was very similar as I wanted to compare answers in a before-and-after nature (though I did add a few more questions with regards to students preferred class activities).
The quick formal observations were developed to provide a brief snapshot of the class in the moment while they were doing an activity. I took these formal observations quickly when I was teaching and supervising the cocktail party and when students were engaged with Twitter.
I managed to do four of these observations for the mock cocktail party, but only two with Twitter on two separate occasions. I had a big challenge with 50% of the questions for the formal observation when students were working with Twitter. Too many students needed direct help to get an accurate number on the third to fifth questions:

These questions inevitably had very inaccurate numbers.

Currently on Twitter you can see the various student tweets with the #elsa6. This categorization has allowed me to easily analyse student’s work. I also made lists of notes on student work within my AR journal.

**DATA CODIFICATION**

For the post and pre unit questionnaires I pulled out like questions and codified them into a chart for easy comparison (see chart 1 below). This was done by calculating the average answers for the sliding bar questions (the sliding bar translated into a numerical value. The closer the value was to 100 the more positive the answer. For example: the value closer to 100 with the question “Comfort with computers” indicated a high level of comfort. While inversely the value closer to 0 indicated a participant was very uncomfortable with computers.).

This sliding bar question was used for the class in both the pre and post unit questionnaires. I also pulled data
directly from the questionnaires into chart form through Fluid Survey’s report feature (see chart 2-3 below). This allowed for quick graphical representation of information for analysis. Not all survey questions were codified and analyzed. Questions included in the codified answers were selected on the questions appropriateness with regards to my AR questions, not on the quality of answers to support my outlined goals.

The formal observations were also numerical in nature. They represented the number of students that were actively doing (or not doing) something that I wanted them to focus on. These observations were usually done with no student awareness that the observation was occurring.

Analysis of the actual student’s produced work was done in an informal manner that played out in the moment when the student’s work was assessed. Not all work was collected for the purpose of my AR. Some work was assessed for competencies in the target skills of my mandated curriculum, while a select sampling of student work was chosen when it reflected the questions of my AR. This data, like that of the selected questions in the questionnaires, was chosen not for the usefulness in providing the answers I desired for my AR questions, but for their ability to reveal a connection to my AR questions.

Chart 1: Codified select questions from the questionnaires:
Chart 2 Fluid Survey data from Pre Questionnaire:

Check what you have used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify...</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 14

Chart 3 Fluid Survey data from Post Questionnaire:

Check what has helped you in this unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mock cocktail party (speaking practice)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocktail metaphor to explain twitter</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing a cocktail party to your cultural event (similar to a cocktail party)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global footprint listening activity</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter to practice my English reading and writing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify...</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESEARCHERS PERSEPECTIVE

My perspective on this data and my AR is from that of an IE lens with a focus on utilizing metaphor extensively to mediate concepts (or at the very least to assess its effectiveness). I also have a preference towards introducing technology within the classroom and “running with” new forms of popular social media and devices for the purpose of engaging education. I am also coming from a pedagogical background that has changed from holistic learning and teaching to that of a more systemic and explicit mediation of concepts that runs parallel to, but not completely in line with, the core theories of Vygotsky with his championing of structured and explicitly mediated scientific concept development over spontaneous, implicit, and unstructured concept development. It is within this mindset that I approached my AR and attempted to verify my findings.
DATA INTERPRETATION (RESULTS AND ANALYSIS)

The three goals of my AR with regards to using metaphor were met with varying degrees of success.

OVERCOMING LANGUAGE BARRIERS IN MEDIATING A CONCEPT:

My students had some prior knowledge of Twitter, but very few had any real experience. Only 3 students out of the 14 surveyed had used Twitter before we started (see chart 2 above and figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Students not familiar with Twitter in English

This suited my study well to introduce Twitter as a new concept with prior knowledge being minimal and most experience with Twitter grounded in a language other than English. Twitter and some of its core concepts (following, unfollowing, and tweeting) were taught exclusively through the metaphor of the cocktail party. Looking back at my AR journal I found I was constantly returning to this metaphor when students were struggling with how to initially set up and use Twitter. It is through this metaphor that I heavily mediated the concept of following and unfollowing someone on Twitter. By the end of our first two classes on Twitter, all students (14) had followed the class website and had attempted to tweet. Figure 2 is a snapshot of the class account @Elsa610 in April of 2013, while figure 3 is the same account as of March 2014 (after the class started following and tweeting). Granted, not

8 1: Overcoming language barrier in mediating a concept, 2: Overcoming student disengagement in content that is seen as not as valuable as other knowledge 3: Overcoming fossilization of adult learners’ style of learning
all of the new followers from last year are students, but upon looking in depth at who was following @Elsa610 all of my students who participated in class had became followers. Further investigating turned up that 13 out of 15 students had started following other classmates.

It appeared the metaphor at least allowed students to follow and unfollow, but describing a tweet in the context of a cocktail party created confusion. I had noted in my AR journal that many students seemed to resist this idea of tweeting as a form of saying something as they gravitated towards it as a post on Facebook (where according to chart 2, 8 out of the 14 surveyed had used Facebook). These students had difficulty tweeting as they kept on running into the 140 character limit with a tweet. On the flip side, many students were able to convey tweets in a manner that resembled an interesting fact while using the # (see figure 4 below).

Figure 4: Student's earliest tweets
When we look at the pre and post unit questionnaires (chart 1), student perception of their knowledge of social media went from an average of 48 (which would indicate that the student’s believe that they think they know slightly less than the average person) to an average of 72. A value of 72 would be the rough equivalent of a person who is not an expert, but who believes they know a fair amount more than the average Canadian. At least in the eyes of the student, they have appeared to have improved their knowledge of social media. I acknowledge that this may not be the result of using metaphor and may just be the result of teaching a topic the students may not have be familiar with.

OVERCOMING STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT IN CONTENT THAT IS SEEN AS NOT AS VALUABLE AS OTHER KNOWLEDGE

For some students learning the concept of Twitter was seen as a valuable skill to have as it connected to networking and furthering their careers through the meeting of a variety of potential leads. These students didn’t actually help me completely explore all of my AR questions as they already “bought in” and were engaged. Some of my students were raising and focusing on their families while their spouses were working. These students had expressed no real desire to network and try to develop a career in Canada. It is through these students, and looking at the class as a whole, that may reveal something connected to my AR question regarding student engagement.

The “Unexpected Outcomes” section student, Anju, was a student focused on raising her children while her spouse worked. From her experience it appeared that she had gone from disengagement to engagement with Twitter. Suffice to say this student started to participate after an earlier reluctance. Unfortunately, this engagement may have been more from a feeling of being left out than an increased engagement due to metaphor. In fact, any apparent increase in student engagement is difficult to connect directly to metaphor and may just originate from the novelty of Twitter.

One of the biggest surprises I found was during my formal observations of class activity during various parts of my AR. I had several supposedly quickly filled-out observation questions (which were to give me a good idea on what was going on without taking too much time away from students and the class) that weren’t as easy to implement as I planned. Because of the demands of actually teaching and the need of direct mediation for some
students with low ability/comfort with computers, only about 60% of survey questions were filled out. By the end I was drained teaching those lower ability students while those who were involved with the task moved on before I could document their activity. I did manage to collect some interesting facts with the three observed activities (mock cocktail party, Twitter cocktail party, Twitter tweets).

During the mock cocktail party the majority of students appeared to be actively engaged throughout the activity. Of those students I observed that appeared to be engaged: 24 out of 25 were in the 1st observation, 24 out of 25 were in the 2nd observation done 6 minutes later, 22 out of 24 were in the third observation 15 minutes later and 17 out of 19 were in the 4th observation done a following 15 minutes later. Almost no students appeared confused or lost (only 2 students observed appeared to be lost or confused in the last observation), but that could have been due to the novelty of the activity and the general sense of community found in the program amongst participants. The biggest surprise seemed to be that students were really engaged in this activity and didn’t hesitate to participate in a potentially foreign networking event as this mock cocktail party seemed to be.

When we made the leap to actually using Twitter I managed two more observations during the same activity on two different days. This was where I saw the biggest surprise in student engagement between the two days and where I had the most challenging time to do the observation while trying to actually teach. For the first activity I had several students looking confused and some not even using the computer during both observations (first observation: out of 18 students, 1 looking lost/confused, 2 not using the computer. Second observation: out of 18 students, 2 looking lost/confused, 1 not using the computer). What was interesting is that students appeared reluctant to get involved and actively use Twitter… but by the end of the activity four students who never used Twitter before used their whole lunch (30mins) to tweet and worked right until class resumed.

Further interpretation of the pre/post unit questionnaires also seems to reveal an increase in engagement (see chart 1). Students responded, on average, at a 65 with engagement in the class before Twitter and the cocktail party was introduced. After Twitter was introduced, via the cocktail metaphor, students were polled and averaged an 88 on the same question regarding student engagement. This seems to indicate an increase in student engagement from Twitter and the metaphor. Once again, it is hard to directly connect this increase in
engagement to the use of metaphor. Yet, according to Kieran Egan, the more that someone knows about a topic the more engaged they become (Egan, Learning in Depth, 2010). The 88 average that students answered with regards to their engagement may have been the result of learning about how to use Twitter and increasing their understanding of it. As I explicitly mediated the concept of Twitter through metaphor, this learning may potentially be attested to this metaphor method. It may seem a bit of a stretch, but the high level of increased engagement could be a result of metaphor being utilized in class.

**OVERCOMING FOSSILIZATION OF ADULT LEARNERS’ STYLE OF LEARNING**

Students’ comfort level with computers was focused on to address potential fossilization of adult learners’ style of learning. The level of comfort with computers indicated in the pre unit questionnaire (see chart 1) was at a value of 48. One can speculate that this number could come from a lack of utilization of computers in a student’s life. Whether or not this lack of utilization is in a student’s former education or a lack in their everyday life is irrelevant. From my personal experience I have noticed that a lack of comfort in adult learners with computers can stem from a preference in doing things that have been established and mastered at a very early stage. It is natural for a person to “do” things the way they are comfortable and experienced with. I have seen this manifest in adult learners to the point that they are unable or unwilling to learn in any other way. I have, in fact, seen this in myself. 

The lack of comfort I felt in learning a different way was a direct result of my own fossilization of learning preference. I’ve overlaid this conclusion onto the students’ low level of comfort and fully acknowledge that this may, in fact, not be what the student was feeling when they answered the question regarding computer comfort level.

Seeing the students’ response to the same question in the post unit questionnaire saw a value of 80 (see chart 1). This increase of 32 may indicate a break from a student’s previous learning style. Students expressed that they hadn’t been taught with the use of metaphor before. The explicit use of metaphor in teaching Twitter concepts combined with the requirement of computer skills to utilize these Twitter concepts leads me to believe

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9 Throughout the course of my graduate work I have been through a diverse group of professors with widely varying pedagogical approaches. Some I clicked with and felt I was being academically challenged, while others had such a different pedagogical viewpoint that I could barely get through the course with a feeling of academic achievement.

10 This was expressed when the consent forms were passed out and my AR was explained.
that some of this increase may be due to this metaphor method used in instruction. I was surprised to have seen students respond with such a higher value after utilizing metaphor.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This AR has opened up a potential pathway that I didn’t realize existed between the field of my teaching (ESL adult learners) and IE. Through my study of IE, I came to the conclusion that language acquisition would not be a good fit with Kieran Egan’s IE of cognitive tools and “kinds of understanding.” I was struggling to see where any of his theory may fit within my context. I also struggled to incorporate IE in any practical form in my classroom. By focusing in on one aspect of IE (the cognitive tool: metaphor), and applying it through the filter of AR, I feel like I was able to get a handle on IE within a ESL framework that I would not have received without pursuing this AR. What this has done for me is revealed a potential path that I can follow to explore IE in my own teaching. It has opened a door that I didn’t realized was even there, metaphorically speaking.

My AR has created a realistic space where I feel I can now explore metaphor in an IE manner within an ESL framework. Through applying AR with metaphor I have been able to see some real connections that I didn’t think were there with ESL learners and IE. This manifested itself in a greater understanding, or at the very least, a greater apparent engagement of myself and students with this potentially unfamiliar IE pedagogy. While I haven’t found as strong of a connection as I would have hoped with IE and ESL, I have found that it does provide a new and refreshing manner in which to teach. Of course this could be more thanks to Twitter being new and refreshing for students than the manner in which Twitter was taught.

Informally polling the students after the AR was complete revealed a not-so-rosy picture: Of the 15 students polled, only 1 said the metaphor of the cocktail party actually helped them understand Twitter. When asked if they would continue to use Twitter, only 3 of the 15 students asked said they would. Most said “Facebook is better AND easier.” While I am glad I used metaphor to teach Twitter, and I do think it did help students
understand the concept better, I don’t think the students saw it that way. I have now been recalled to teach a
different subject and level within my district, so I will unfortunately be unable to continue with the @ELSA610
account to see if students actually would have happily continued to use Twitter with classroom activities and
teacher support.

I would have liked to see if students had continued tweeting in a classroom context. I also wanted to
further develop and incorporate Twitter within the classroom now that the initial activities had been established
within the context of the cocktail metaphor. With my recall being to a different class it cuts short my ability to
continue these lines of thought. Even though this AR has come to an end, if I have an opportunity to utilize this
method of teaching Twitter through a metaphor again, I wouldn’t hesitate to try.

This AR also broadened my concept of research to include contextual work that revolves around
professional development as a viable and form of academic research. It further developed my understanding of
the cognitive tool of metaphor within the IE framework in teaching a concept in an engaging manner. With this
further understanding I see a potentially greater ability for me to teach computer based concepts (social media
such as Twitter and Facebook as well as Microsoft Word and other basic computer based concepts). One area I
would like to further explore is that of the student’s own developed cocktail-party-like-event as a mediator of
teaching this concept. The material I read on the African village (Obono, 2009) hammered home the idea that one
must use an appropriate and familiar metaphor for the targeted learner. I never had enough time to fully pursue
and develop this aspect of my AR due to time constraints. Baring such an opportunity with ESL learners, a question
for the future that I would also like to pursue would be: Does this manner of teaching work better or worse with
native English speakers who would be more familiar with the metaphor (cocktail party) utilized to teach the
concept? If I ever get the chance I would use this AR as a spring board for further inquiry into these subjects. AR
has allowed me to follow a line of inquiry that I thought would be beyond the scope of my ability to perform within
the constraints of my class responsibilities. It has also allowed me to start an academic inquiry that doesn’t have
to necessarily end with this report. I feel like it isn’t finished and needs to be revisited again to strengthen areas
(formal observations during activities) and potentially focus and develop others (utilizing students own
metaphors). As it stands, this AR has revealed to me several other paths I would like to walk down to further my own professional development.

**APPENDICES**

Appendices 1-7 (See attached files).

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

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(Simon Fraser University)

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I also understand that I may register any complaint with the Director of the Office of Research Ethics, with the Principal Investigator, or with Dr. Paul Shaker, Dean of Education.

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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Sharon  

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Please print the following information:

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Contact information:

phone [Phone number]
e-mail [Email address]

Signature: [Signature]

Date (use format MM/DD/YYYY): 02/11/2014

Copy for Researchers' records
MOCKTAIL COCKTAIL PARTY

Purpose:

- Speaking practice in small groups
- Networking in English
- Familiarize students with cocktail party to use as a metaphor
- Revisit presentations for
  - student listening and summarize a presentation
  - student presenter summarizing presentation
- Generate short sentences (three) to be used in small talk and then on twitter in the future
- Generate short sentences to be used in small talk and then on twitter in the future
- Lay the groundwork for the twitter cocktail party

STUDENTS PRESENT THEIR SHORT PRESENTATIONS.

- Make notes on each presenter (One sentence)
- Make a sentence from their own presentation (one sentence)

EXPLAIN A COCKTAIL PARTY (SOCIALIZING/NETWORKING)

- Think of something interesting to say (one sentence)

MAKE ON CARDS/POST-ITS...... I COLLECT AND MAKE SOME SUGGESTIONS?

- Mixer with drinks and small snack food...
- Groups of three? Two seems too small.
  - Idea... give everyone a number and then make random groups of three....
    - Give them time to chat, but force them to move on.
- 20 mins to circulate and talk (bell to signal moving to next partner/group?
- Make notes on the most interesting? Helpful? Useful? Take a poll? (online?)
  - Those could be potential students to follow during a cocktail party

FOLLOW-UP METAPHOR...

- Do you have anything like a cocktail party in your native country?
- If so, what? Please explain (writing activity)
  - Country of origin
  - Something the same?
    - Explain

CONTROLLED TWITTER COCKTAIL PARTY

Purpose:

- Use metaphor to teach the concept of twitter
• Introduce a forum to practice short, communicative messages
  o Summarize in a sentence
• Use social media to help learn English
  o Follow people who give tips
  o Practice making sentences
  o Following hashtags with topics related to English
• Increase computer literacy
• Fill out forms with 30+ entrees (creating a twitter account)
• Expand student abilities to network

SET UP TWITTER ACCOUNTS

• Metaphor first
• Previous lesson tweaked to fit metaphor
• Get student’s account going
• Controlled twitter cocktail party with three tweets prepared
  o Follow along with hashtags
• Observation during tweets/after set up

UNCONTROLLED TWITTER COCKTAIL PARTY

Purpose:

• Use social media to help learn English
  o Follow people who give tips
  o Practice making sentences
  o Following hashtags with topics related to English
• Increase computer literacy
• Expand student abilities to network
• Get involved with ongoing conversation

NO LIMITS

• Students follow who they want and tweet what they want
• Use hashtags to find good people/conversations to follow
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<th>19</th>
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Student generated similar cocktail party events

1. Company anniversary party
2. First month baby party
3. Japanese wedding party
4. Dinner party
5. Return from Haj celebration
6. Ashoora: shiite days of remembrance
7. Wedding party (Chinese)
8. Nowrooz
9. Corporate party
10. Church wedding party
11. Tea meeting (Chinese) topic chosen before hand
12. Courting/suitor party (Iran)
13. Chinese wedding party
14. The day of nature (13 Bedar) Iran. Outdoors and relaxed
15. Ladies Sangeet (indian) pre-wedding bridal party
16. Charshanbeh Souri (Iran). Jumping from the fire to put the bad things/past away for new years
17. Soccer party (Polish)
18. Wedding party (Chinese)
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<th>Use as many adjectives as you can to describe this topic</th>
<th>How comfortable are you with computers?</th>
<th>What do you know about social media?</th>
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