INTERCONNECTEDNESS, MULTIPLEXITY AND THE GLOBAL STUDENT: THE ROLE OF BLOGGING AND MICRO BLOGGING IN OPENING STUDENTS' HORIZONS

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ABSTRACT

The concepts of interconnectedness and multiplexity resonate globally in contemporary higher education, legal practice, and in citizens' social and economic experience, where engagement takes place daily over distances mediated by information and communications technology. Meanwhile, literature regarding student transition identifies student engagement as a key to their retention – yet Australia's universities are struggling to compete with our students' employment and caring obligations. Is it possible for lecturers to retain an engaging presence with our students who are more likely than ever before to be distant from campus? How might we provide opportunity and experience to our students, beyond their own community and campus? Is it possible, or even desirable, for us to compete with texting, Facebook and other social media used by our students *within and without the physical classroom*? In this paper, the authors explore the world of blogging and micro blogging (Twitter) as a means of mediating engagement with students, lawyers, academics and other interested and interesting people around the world. Through the use of auto-ethnographic case studies of their own experiences with blogging and micro blogging tools, the authors propose that far from being a distraction from student learning, these tools have the potential to open up an international professional collaborative space beyond the physical classroom, for both academics and our students, from their first year experience through to practical legal training and continuing professional development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the role of information communication technology ('ICT') in higher education, which reflects some concerns. These concerns are: whether there is a divide between digital natives (students) and digital immigrants (academics)?[1] How do we bridge that

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1 Marc Prensky, 'Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants' (2001) 9(5) *On the Horizon*; Sue Bennett, Karl Maton and Lisa Kervin,'The "Digital Natives" Debate: A Critical Review of the Evidence(2008) 39 (5) *British Journal of Educational Technology* 775; Neil Selwyn, 'The Digital Native – Myth and Reality'(2009)61 (4) *Aslib Proceedings* 364.

divide?[2] How can academics use ICT to enhance student learning?[3] How can ICT be used to assess learning?[4] Is ICT better than face-to-face teaching? What are the risks involved in using ICT?[5]

While this debate continues, scholarly literature including books, journals, and case and statute law are increasingly found online,[6] student enrolment systems go online, universities sign up to Facebook and Twitter,[7] staff and students are allocated space in the 'cloud' for data storage, and university content management systems have their own 'apps' suitable for mobile use.[8] Despite the extent to which we find our academic lives immersed in ICT, academics still wonder how it can sensibly be used in educating our students.

In the arena of the academic's tripartite work life (teaching, research and engagement) ICT again plays a significant role. Expectations of innovative and engaging teaching reaching out to the so-called digital native student and navigating content management systems contrast with the 19th century research culture of double blind peer review journals (until recently ranked in Australia according to esteem). Likewise, community engagement is just as likely to occur through school visits and faculty open days as through press releases to the mainstream media.

Increasingly, reports are emerging of academics overwhelmed by the task they face to meet various outcomes. One of the reasons for this seems to be a lack of understanding of just how

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2   JISC, *Emerging Practice in a Digital Age: A Guide to Technology-Enhanced Institutional Innovation* (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2011); Adrian Kirkwood and Linda Price, 'Learners and Learning in the Twenty-First Century: What Do We Know About Students' Attitudes Towards and Experiences of Information and Communication Technologies That Will Help Us Design Courses?' (2005) 30(3) *Studies in Higher Education* 257; Pauling, Brian, 'Engaging the Digital Natives', in Terry Evans, Margaret Haughey, and David Murphy (eds.), *International Handbook of Distance Education* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2008), 385.

3   Jocasta Williams and Michael Fardon, ' "Perpetual Connectivity": Lecture Recordings and Portable Media Players' (Paper presented at the ICT: Providing Choices for Learners and Learning, Singapore, 2007); Helen Beetham and Rhona Sharpe (eds), *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age: Designing and Delivering E-Learning* (Routledge, 2007); David Boud, and Michael Prosser, 'Appraising New Technologies for Learning: A Framework for Development' (2002) 39(3/4) *Educational Media International – ICTS and Media: Refereed Papers.*

4   J W Gikandi, D Morrow and N E Davis, 'Online Formative Assessment in Higher Education: A Review of the Literature' (2011) 57(4) *Computers & Education* 2333.

5   Tara Brabazon, Digital Hemlock: Internet Education and the Poisoning of Teaching (University of New South Wales Press, 2002); Tara Brabazon, The University of Google: Education in the (post) Information Age (Ashgate, 2008); Robin Goodfellow and Mary R Lea Challenging E-Learning in the University: A Literacies Perspective (McGraw Hill, 2007).

6   Christine L Borgman, *Scholarship in the Digital Age: Information, Infrastructure and the Internet* (The MIT Press, 2007).Statutes and case law are found in particular through free platforms such as the Australasian Legal Information Institute <http://www.austlii.edu.au/> and its equivalent sites in jurisdictions overseas, but also through proprietary databases.

7   Twig Marketing, *Twig Marketing Australian University Facebook Index 2012* (2012); Brian Kelly, **'**Institutional Use of Twitter by Russell Group Universities**'(**14 January 2011)*UK Web Focus*<***http://ukwebfocus.wordpress.com/2011/01/14/institutional-use-of-twitter-by-russell-group-universities/>***; Brian Kelly, 'Social Analytics for Russell Group University Twitter Accounts' (28 June 2011) *UK Web Focus* <http://ukwebfocus.wordpress.com/2011/06/28/social-analytics-for-russell-group-university-twitter-accounts/>; 'Top 10 in Social Media in HE' *Science Guide* (21 December 2010) <http://www.scienceguide.nl/201012/top-10-of-social-media-in-he.aspx>

8   See eg Blackboard, 'Blackboard Mobile Overview' <http://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Mobile/Overview.aspx>; Moodle, 'Mobile Moodle FAQ' <http://docs.moodle.org/22/en/Mobile_Moodle_FAQ>.

ICT works, and how it may serve as a tool for teaching and for research and engagement.[9] It seems that students too may resist new technologies and a blended curriculum design.[10]

Against this background, literature on the transition experience still identifies lack of engagement in campus life as a predictor of students at risk.[11] Because retention is a measure of university success, the third generation approach to first year[12] has resulted in significant institutional resources being devoted to addressing student engagement – often with a focus on attendance on campus. An increasing focus on work integrated learning and student contact with the legal profession is seen as an important strategy to support an authentic learning environment within which to nurture the emergent professional identity of the student and to maximize student learning.[13]

In this paper we pose the question: can ICT provide a means by which to align the academic's work with student learning and engagement? Through collaborative auto-ethnography[14] this paper seeks to provide an insight into how an academic might use the particular ICT tools of blogging and micro-blogging as a means by which to navigate the complex terrain of contemporary practice while engaging students in a learning and professional community. Importantly, this methodology affords concrete examples of the ways in which these tools mediate interactions between academics, professionals, students and the wider community. Additionally, it offers an integrated rationale for using these technologies as a means to participate in a globally connected community.

II. Blogging, Micro-blogging and Multiplexity

In 2006, Black provided a comprehensive description of the evolution and nature of the blog:

> A blog is a website where regular entries are made (such as in a journal or diary) and presented in reverse chronological order. They often comment on the news or on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or music. Some are personal online diaries.[15]

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9   Betty Collis and JefMoonen, *Flexible Learning in a Digital World* (Routledge, 2002); Evrim Baran, Ana-Paula Correia, and Ann Thompson, 'Transforming Online Teaching Practice: Critical Analysis of the Literature on the Roles and Competencies of Online Teachers' (2011) 32(3) *Distance Education* 421.

10 NF Johnson, D McDonald and T Brabazon, 'Rage Against the Machine? Symbolic Violence in E-learning Supported Tertiary Education' (2008) 5(3) *E-Learning* 275.

11 Kerri-Lee Krauseet al, The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, 2005); Craig McInnis, Signs of Disengagement? The Changing Undergraduate Experience in Australian Universities (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, 2001); Craig McInnis, Richard James and Robyn Hartley, Trends in the First Year Experience: In Australian Universities (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, 2000)

12 Sally Kift, Karen Nelson and John Clarke, 'Transition Pedagogy: A Third Generation Approach to FYE: A Case Study of Policy and Practice for the Higher Education Sector' (2010) 1 *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* 1.

13 T Foley et al, 'A Puppy Lawyer Is Not Just for Christmas: Helping New Lawyers Successfully Make the Transition to Professional Practice Working Paper Series (June 30, 2011); Margie Rowe, Moira Murray and Fiona Westwood, 'Professionalism in Pre-practice Legal Education: An Insight into the Universal Nature of Professionalism and the Development of Professional Identity' (2012) 46(2) *The Law Teacher* 120; Kathy Douglas and Belinda Johnson, 'Legal Education and E-Learning: Online Fishbowl Role-Play as a Learning and Teaching Strategy in Legal Skills Development' (2010) 17(1) *eLaw Journal: Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law* 28.

14 F Ngunjiri, K Hernandez, and H Chang, 'Living Autoethnography: Connecting Life and Research' (2010) 6(1) *Journal of Research Practice* [editorial].

15 Peter Black, 'Uses of Blogs in Legal Education' (2006) 13 *JCU Law Review* 8.

At that time, Black cites IT commentator Technorati as having tracked over 60 million blogs.[16]It is now considered almost impossible to accurately calculate the number of blogs and there are now a number of sites hosting free blogs: anyone could set one up. One of these alone, Word press, reports 72.5 million blogs today,[17] up from 32.5 million blogs in mid 2011.[18] Likewise, Tumblr set up in 2007 and already has over 50.5 million blogs, with over 55 million posts *a day*.[19] There are many more blog host sites.

Technorati provides a breakdown of what kinds of people blog, and what they blog for. It identifies hobby and professional bloggers – distinguishing those who make money from blogging and those who do not.[20] The primary purposes are personal, topical and corporate. While a personal blog for example may chart one's weight loss journey it could likewise comment on politics or current affairs. A corporate blog will seek to keep clients informed or to sell a product. The focus of this paper is on the topic blog – a blog with a single interest focus that may be either personal or run by a team – and in particular, legal blogs either professional or academic.

Not only does the number of blogs and blog posts continue to rise exponentially, but so does the influence of blogs: both on their readership directly, as well as more widely. Indeed the influence of blogs on current affairs has become so great that contemporary journalism has had to search for a means of distinguishing itself as a profession from the hobby commentator,[21] and mainstream media is feeling the pinch of free news, seeking a means of capturing an income via the blogosphere.[22]

A. *Microblogging*

Blogging has evolved further since the launch of Twitter in July 2006. Twitter is a form of *microblogging*– by subscribing to Twitter, the subscriber can send information in the form of a 140 character message known as a *tweet*. The subscriber can elect to 'follow' other accounts, and others can follow the subscriber.[23] Through following accounts, or searching the platform on a particular topic, the user can view a 'stream' of tweets.

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16 Ibid, 12.
17 Wordpress Stats (5 April 2012) <http://en.wordpress.com/stats/>.
18 Web Articles, 'Are There Too Many Blogs?' (14 July 2011) <http://www.templatesold.com/articles/web-design/are-there-too-many-blogs/>
19 *About Us* (5 April, 2012) Tumblr<http://www.tumblr.com/about>.
20 *State of the Blogosphere Part 1* Technorati (4 November 2011) <http://technorati.com/social-media/article/state-of-the-blogosphere-2011-part1/>
21 Homero Gil de Zúñiga et al, 'Blogging as a Journalistic Practice: A Model Linking Perception, Motivation, and Behavior' (2011) 12(5) *Journalism* 586; Alfred Hermida, 'Social Journalism: Exploring How Social Media is Shaping Journalism' in Eugenia Siapera and Andreas Veglis (eds), *The Handbook of Global Online Journalism* (John Wiley and Sons, 2012), 309.
22 Marcus Messner and Bruce Garrison,'Study Shows Some Blogs Affect Traditional News Media Agendas' (2011) 32 (3)*Newspaper Research Journal* 112; Ryan Fuller et al, *HuffPo Bloggers Raise Status and Pay Concerns:Responses to the AOL-Huffington Post Merger* (Carsey-Wolf Center Media Industries Project, 2011).
23 For a comprehensive overview of subscribing and functions, see Amy Mollett, Danielle Moran and Patrick Dunleavy, *Using Twitter in University Research, Teaching and Impact Activities: A Guide for Academics and Researchers* (London School of Economics Public Policy Group, September 2011).

Twopblog, a Twitter analyst, reported Twitter's 500 millionth account in February 2012.[24] It does point out that this figure is contested: not all accounts are 'active,' that is they do not follow anyone and they have no followers. An *active* user would be a user who not just reads tweets but also sends them. It is impossible to gauge how many *active* users there are. Even those who do not actively send messages may be peripherally participating by following the stream of a particular person or topic area. It is probably impossible to gauge how many would use Twitter in this way. In any case, the number of tweets per day has jumped from 27 million in November 2009, to 290 million in February 2012[25] though again there is no way to determine how many of these were personally crafted, representing genuine engagement by real people, and how many were automatically generated, or 'spam'.

In addition to those who are either active on Twitter or who join up simply to look at it, the medium has influence beyond its own platform. It is possible to embed tweets within a website – or a learning management platform such as Blackboard or Moodle.[26] In the case of both blogs and microblogs of course, their popularity does not validate the source or the information presented. Principles of information literacy still apply and judgements need to be made about the quality of information at every turn.[27] However the sheer volume of blogging and tweeting means that we cannot ignore it as a potential source of information. In addition, this raw data ignores what is arguably the *real* value in these media: that of connectedness, networking and multiplexity.

B. *Multiplexity in the Medium*

The focus so far in describing blogging and microblogging has been on the media as a means of disseminating information: through a blog post or a tweet, and the receipt by the viewer of that information. This implies a passive engagement as the reader, or an active engagement insofar as dissemination of information is concerned. While this offers obvious benefits for those who participate, this description fails to capture the social aspects of these media. Of particular interest here, are these media's capacity to facilitate networks.

A network is a set of relations, and within a social network, 'friendship, love, money, power, ideas and even disease' might pass between members.[28] In the educational context, network theory might describe the lecture theatre or perhaps the wider university campus as a 'closed box network'.[29] This implies a limitation to the number of people with whom a student may form relationships. The limitation arises through the proximity of students and academics to one another through location and through enrolment. There is also a limitation as to the roles undertaken by members of such a network – for example, the network would consist perhaps of students and academic staff, but not members of the profession.

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24 Adrianus,'An Estimate of Active Twitter Accounts Per Ultimo February 2012'(5 March, 2012) Twopblog<http://www.twopblog.com/2012/03/estimate-of-active-twitter-accounts-per.html>; Joann Pan, *Will You Be Twitter's 500 Millionth User? [Updated]* (23 February 2012) Mashable Social Media<http://mashable.com/2012/02/22/twitters-500-million-user/>; Nicholas Carson, *How Many Users does Twitter REALLY Have?*(31 March 2011) Business Insider<http://articles.businessinsider.com/2011-03-31/tech/30049251_1_twitter-accounts-active-twitter-user-simple-answer>.

25 Ben Cherry, *Twitter: How Many Tweets Per Day Are There on Twitter?*(21 January, 2012) Quora<http://www.quora.com/Twitter-1/How-many-tweets-per-day-are-there-on-Twitter>.

26 For instructions on embedding a twitter 'widget', see *About Twitter – Widgets*Twitter <https://twitter.com/about/resources/widgets>.

27 Cass R Sunstein, *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 2006). For a critique of unmediated online information, see Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur* (Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2008).

28 Charles Kadushin, Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts and Findings (Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-4.

29 Ibid, 17.

While work placements, internships, clinical legal education and careers events will provide opportunities for widening students' networks, social media provides an even wider opportunity. This is where the notion of multiplexity arises.

'*Multiplexity* recognizes that there may be many networks that connect, in different ways...'[30] This can occur in relation to the roles that people have – so a fellow student in a network might also be a friend – but also in relation to the content that passes between members of the network. In the latter case, this could be personal support, course information or information about employment.[31]

This term therefore encompasses some of the ideas implicit in the focus on student engagement in learning – not just through the formal curriculum, but also through social contacts and wider support, or, an informal curriculum. That is to say, the higher education literature recognizes the need for multiplexity in students' networking: a variety of roles and connections amongst their networks to support their learning.[32] In capturing the complexity of the types of roles played in the support of student learning, the term also has the capacity to represent the importance of student engagement with the profession.

If limited to the physical world, such networks have the capacity to be multiplex, but this is contained within the strictures of geography. The virtual world frees the student and the academic from these limitations, opening up an almost unlimited capacity for new networks in both the content and types of engagement, and the identity or role of those in the network. The authors themselves represent part of a network, and detail their own experiences as evidence of the potential of blogging and microblogging in the educational and academic context.

III. Life in the Blogosphere

In conceiving and writing this paper, the three writers seek to exemplify the very interconnectedness we feel is possible, mediated through ICT tool of micro-blogging in particular. Our initial connection through Twitter has resulted in sharing and collaboration in blogs, and finally through presenting and writing in a more conventional academic medium of a face to face conference.

After seeing increasing Twitter traffic about the utility of blogging for academics,[33] and our shared observation of the development of intellectual and academic ideas and personae via the Twitter medium, we felt that our journeys – individual, intersecting and shared – might themselves provide data to support others in their own experimentation with these media. We do this through the methodology of auto ethnography.[34]

Somewhat more than a simple case study of the authors' own practice, auto ethnography is 'a qualitative research method that utilizes data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context.'[35] Use of this methodology aims then to articulate our common experience in the use of these media and to extrapolate from

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30 Ibid, 28.

31 Ibid, 36.

32 For examples see Gráinne Conole and Panagiota Alevizou, *A Literature Review of the Use of Web 2.0 Tools in Higher Education* (The Open University, 2010).

33 Sam Roggeveen, *Why Academics Should Blog* (16 February 2012) The Interpreter<http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2012/02/16/Why-academics-should-blog.aspx>; Patrick Dunleavy and Chris Gilson, *Five minutes with Patrick Dunleavy and Chris Gilson: "Blogging is Quite Simply, One of the Most Important Things That an Academic Should be Doing Right Now"* (24 February 2012) London School of Economics<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/24/five-minutes-patrick-dunleavy-chris-gilson/>; Sinclair Davidson, *Why Academics Should Blog* (28 February 2011) Blog Central<http://raws.adc.rmit.edu.au/~e81843/blog2/?p=80>.

34 Leon Anderson, 'Analytic Autoethnography' (2006) 35(4) *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 373 compares 'evocative' autoethnography with 'analytical' autoethnography – this article tends to the former as a precursor to the latter.

35 Above, n 14 [3].

this a narrative around the idea of such media and the practice involved. The authors see this methodology as an extension of the idea of the reflective practitioner, who through reflection seeks to develop a rationale for practice and to take informed actions.[36]

A. *Networking in the 'Twitterverse'*

While each of the authors joined Twitter for a variety of personal and professional reasons, our interests have caused us to connect as part of a larger network of legal educators and lawyers – and indeed a network on a number of different levels. Each of the authors is part of a Twitter network with 'fuzzy' boundaries – there are few silos here. Our lists of followers include solicitors, barristers, academic lawyers, teachers, educational academics, PhD candidates, official feeds from legal organisations (including courts), statutory bodies, government departments, non-government organisations, students (not only our own), musicians, artists, writers, film-makers, inventors, journalists, commentators and interested and interesting members of the public. Some of these feeds are 'strictly business', however many tend to blur personal and professional domains by declaring opinions, tastes, and dispositions. Through engaging in these networks – both reading and tweeting – each of us has seen value in taking a cross-disciplinary approach to most topics.

For two of us (Greaves and Galloway) in particular, this network has broadened our capacity to engage with those sharing similar interests. Greaves is presently a full time PhD candidate working often from remote locations, and Galloway works at a smaller regional university. In each case, contact with those who share intellectual interest is limited geographically. Microblogging facilitates a much broader network.

Twitter supports our research by connecting us to global networks of academics involved in subject matter that is the same or similar or complementary to our own. Each of us has experienced productive interactions with academic and practising lawyers, at all levels of experience and seniority, all around the world. Galloway for example interacts with property law academics in the UK who share an interest in teaching the subject through the concept of sustainability. Castan is part of an extensive global human rights network of academics, practitioners and NGOs that provides a forum for ideas. For all of us though, engagement with lawyers and legal thinkers internationally that is regardless of location, highlights the utility of this medium for connecting globally.

Interactions can consist of simply sharing (or re-tweeting) a link to a blog post or peer-reviewed article, or a pithy comment; or they can involve extended discussions with one or more other correspondents. Some discussions earn their own hashtag (a search term connector), and this allows participants to 'tie' their tweets to a topic for as long as they desire. Some hash tags are perpetual (for example: #auslaw, #legaled, #phdchat), some are event-driven (for example: #ALTA2012) others emerge from the ongoing discussion (eg #multiplexity). Sometimes tweets take a surprising turn – on one occasion a frivolous tweet, 'I'm imagining Bourdieu and Latour having an arm wrestle' – elicited a response from one North American academic with a direction to useful literature about a theoretical dispute that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Importantly, and as a facet of multiplexity, the professional networks developed on Twitter – exemplified by our co-authorship of this paper – are also networks of friendship and professional support and of those who share other common interests. These relationships provide ongoing inspiration and support, and 'constructive confrontation' that challenge our assumptions and complacencies. Perhaps reflecting the collegiate nature of the workplace or the student experience, this online environment provides opportunities for layered interactions and a connection, a sense of community that in our experience, can enhance teaching, learning and

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36 Stephen D Brookfield, Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, (Jossey Bass, 1995), 45; Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Arena, 1995).

thinking.[37] Notably none of us uses Twitter, or micro-blogging, alone – each of us extends our capacity to engage with these networks through our own blogs.

B. *Blogs as a Scholarly Tool*

Again, each of the authors' blogs reflects our own particular interests and slightly different rationale for engagement in the medium – though in each case, a scholarly approach is adopted that allows us to engage with diverse and global networks, including with our own students.[38] A blog offers this opportunity for engagement by allowing people to read and comment on the material when and where it suits them, that is, without constraint by organisational or geographical boundaries. Additionally, it allows publication of scholarly work without the strictures and time lags of conventional academic publishing.[39] Each time a blog post is published the author sends a link out via Twitter, promoting 'traffic' to the blog post and discussion both on Twitter and via comments on the blog itself.

As a journal-type format, each of us finds the blog as a medium ideal for sharing ideas,[40] clarifying our own thinking, and as way of keeping track of ideas as they develop. This can be seen in particular on Pleagle Trainer Blog, and Curl, which each author uses to develop thinking around their PhD research and teaching.[41]

Pleagle Trainer Blog is mostly focused on the topic of teaching and other aspects of practical legal training, which might be treated as a cognate of clinical legal education in jurisdictions outside of Australia. Greaves is especially interested in the use of ICT as part of a blended instructional design, and is also interested in evidence-based approaches to teaching methods that are useful to teachers in practical legal training. More recently he has been researching a sociologically informed approach to the scholarship of teaching in practical legal training. At first glance the audience for this blog would be a niche of those interested in the research and scholarship of teaching practical legal training, however people involved in teaching at law school, clinical legal education field, continuing legal education, and general education, in Australia and overseas (mostly the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States) visit or subscribe to the blog.

Curl started more recently as a vehicle to express ideas relevant to the author's teaching and research interests – notably property law, legal education and women in law. It offers a means of communicating immediately on the topic of the day and like Pleagle Trainer Blog, offers a repository of thoughts to generate broader discussion and also to map thinking over time. Galloway's blog posts, both here and guest posts elsewhere, are included in her university's e-research depository as scholarly articles.

As a teaching tool the blog provides a model for students of engagement in legal issues. It is used as a point of reference for class discussion, and as a means of guiding potential honours students in their thinking about various topics. For example, Galloway provides students with links to posts in Curl that relate to what she is teaching. Students have provided feedback of both the usefulness and the motivation for learning of various posts. More widely, the blog is read by both Australian and international audiences of lawyers, academics, other students and

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37 Conole and Alevizou, above n 32, 16.

38 Tanya Golash-Boza, *So, You Want to Start an Academic Blog? Four Tips to Know Before You Start* (17 February 2011) Get a Life, PhD<http://getalifephd.blogspot.com.au/2011/02/so-you-want-to-start-academic-blog-four.html>.

39 Dunleavy and Gilson, above n 33; David Gauntlett, *How to Move Towards a System that looks to "Publish Then Filter" Academic Research* (10 July 2012) LSE Impact of Social Sciences Blog<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/07/10/publish-then-filter-research/>.

40 David McKenzie and BerkOzler, *Academic Blogs are Proven to Increase Dissemination of Economic Research and Improve Impact* (15 November 2011) London School of Economics<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/11/15/world-bank-dissemination/>.

41 Kristoffer Greaves, *Pleagle Trainer Blog*<http://thekglawyerblog.com/ptblog/>; Kate Galloway, *Curl* <http://katgallow.blogspot.com.au/>.

non-lawyers. This is evidenced not only through the comments on the blog, but also through discussions on Twitter in response to each post. In terms of reach, Curl has attracted over 15,000 hits since January 2012 mainly from Australia, the US, UK and Canada, but also from elsewhere. While there is not a direct connection with each reader, this nonetheless represents a large market for ideas coming from a small regional city.

Amicae Curiae[42] was started by Castan and a colleague, as an adjunct to some published research on the expectations and motivations of law students.[43] It invites guest bloggers to post around its theme of 'discussing the role of women in the law, in legal education, as students, as academics, and within the legal profession'.[44] It seeks to fill the gap between a blind peer-reviewed journal and the lecture theatre, and encourages submissions and conversation. In this way, the blog engages a wide international and Australian audience in contemporary feminist legal issues. In this blog and in Curl, posts have attracted the attention of online media outlets from time to time,[45] affording an additional avenue of publishing and an even larger audience, on issues as they arise.

IV. Micro/Blogging in the Academy

Our respective (and collective) experience on Twitter and blogging is borne out by the literature on social media in higher education. While there is some evidence that Facebook is regarded by students as a social space, differentiated from the learning environment,[46] there is a growing body of literature supporting the use of Web 2.0 technologies generally in an educational context. Naturally, the considerations for using these tools as a teaching medium are similar to using other forms of ICT as a teaching medium. The medium is not the message, and it is only used to facilitate teaching and learning.[47]

In the contemporary higher education context, the role of the academic as teacher has become more of a facilitator of student learning than the resident expert.[48] While social engagement between student and academic via social media may not be attractive to students, the blurred boundaries between teacher and learner such as those we have observed, and the extended collegiate network available via Web 2.0 technologies including Twitter and blogging, do

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42 *AmicaeCuriae*<http://amicaecuriae.com/>.

43 Melissa Castan and Jeannie Paterson, 'From Supergirl to Invisible Woman: The Divide Between Student Perception and Professional Reality in Corporate Legal Practice' (2010) 35(3) *Alternative Law Journal* 138; Melissa Castan et al, 'Early Optimism? First-year Law Students' Work Expectations and Aspirations' (2010) 20 (1 and 2) *Legal Education Review* 1.

44 *About Us*Amicae Curiae <http://amicaecuriae.com/about/>.

45 See egKate Galloway, *Anglican Marriage Changes: Why Asking Wife to 'Submit' over 'Obey' is a Dangerous Development*(27 August, 2012) Women's Agenda <http://www.womensagenda.com. au/talking-about/opinions/anglican-marriage-changes-why-asking-wife-to-submit-over-obey-is-a-dangerous-development/20120826459>.

46 Conole and Alevizou, above n 32, 62. In contrast, see MDRoblyer et al, 'Findings on Facebook in Higher Education: A Comparison of College Faculty and Student Uses and Perceptions of Social Networking Sites' (2010) 13 *Internet and Higher Education* 134.

47 For an introduction to instructional design considerations, see: Michael R. Simonson et al, *Teaching and Learning at a Distance : Foundations of Distance Education* (4th ed, Allyn & Bacon, 2009) xix, 374.

48 Regina Bento et al, 'Fostering Online Student Participation' (2005) 2(7)*Journal of College Teaching & Learning*31; Nada Dabbagh and Rick Rio, 'The Impact of Web 2.0 on Higher Education' in Daniel W Surry, James R Stefurak and Robert M Gray (eds), *Technology Integration in Higher Education: Social and Organizational Aspects* (IGI Global, 2010), 174; Abbas Foroughi, 'A Research Framework for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Implementations of Social Media in Higher Education' (2011) V(1) *Online Journal of Workforce Education and Development* 1

facilitate a less formal learning environment.[49]This environment could be harnessed within the classroom, but in particular as we have observed it, most effectively as an adjunct to support student learning and connectedness.[50]

Such an environment whether formal or informal, has been shown to foster collaboration skills in student cohorts[51]– again, with multiple possible networks. Collaboration is recognised as a vital (indeed, threshold) skill for law graduates[52] though it has sometimes been a challenge to incorporate and assess in the classroom, particularly in the law curriculum.[53] The evidence concerning social media as a means of fostering collaboration suggests this tool might usefully be incorporated into the law curriculum to facilitate not just student engagement, but collaboration also.

Importantly however, use of these tools needs to start 'at home' and it is challenging indeed to consider how an academic could incorporate these tools into instructional design, or facilitate student use without themselves having experience in the media. The first step would be to set up a Twitter account.[54] Relevantly, consider whether this will be a personal or professional account (or a combination). It is of course possible to have more than one account. Consider also the risks, and legal and professional ethics consequences of this form of engagement with students and others.[55] One might flippantly say there is only one rule on social media, 'Act Professionally', however it is worth investigating in more detail what is reasonable and appropriate for your workplace.[56]

Becoming globally connected through Twitter to: exchange, discuss, or collaborate on ideas takes only a little effort and time. Through Twitter it is possible to connect to other students, teachers, researchers and academics with a range of experience and expertise living and working in a variety of circumstances. For example:

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49 Foroughi, above n 48; Grace Saw and Wendy Abbott, 'Social Media for International Students: It's Not All About Facebook' (Paper presented at the 33rd Annual IATUL Conference., Singapore, 4-7 June, 2012)

50 Linda W Friedman and Hershey H Friedman, 'Worlds Collide: Exploring the Use of Social Media Technologies for Online Learning' (Paper presented at the Decision Sciences Institute Conference, November 2011); Stefan Hrastinski and AghaeeNaghmeh, 'How Are Campus Students Using Social Media to Support Their Studies? An Explorative Interview Study' (2012) 17(4) *Education and Information Technologies* 451; Stephen Colbran and Tony Gilding,'On-line Learning in Australian Law Schools' (forthcoming).more information needed on this paper.

51 See for example, Evrim Baran and Ana-Paula Correia, 'Student-Led Facilitation Strategies in Online Discussions', (2009) 30(3) *Distance Education* 339; Jane E Brindley, Christine Walti, and Lisa M Blaschke, 'Creating Effective Collaborative Learning Groups in an Online Environment' (2009) 10(3) *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning;* Gerald F Hess, 'Collaborative Course Design: Not My Course, Not Their Course, but Our Course (Humanizing Legal Education Symposium)' (2008) 47(2)*Washburn Law Journal* 367; Andrea Solimeno et al, 'The Influence of Students and Teachers Characteristics on the Efficacy of Face-to-Face and Computer Supported Collaborative Learning', (2008) 51(1) *Computers & Education* 109.

52 Sally Kift, Mark Israel and Rachael Field, 'Bachelor of Laws Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Statement' (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2010).

53 Elizabeth Handsley, 'Good Practice Guide (Bachelor of Laws) Collaboration Skills' (ALTC, 2011).

54 Mollet, Moran and Dunleavy, above n 23.

55 See Melissa Castan and OyielaLitaba, 'Lawyers Conduct and Social Media: Tips and Traps' (2012) 10 *Precedent* 18.

56 Angus Macinnis, 'Guilt Written all over your Facebook: Liability for Publication in Social Media', (2011) 49 (5) *Law Society Journal* 30. Many Universities do not yet have social media policies, for an example see Monash University, *Social Media Procedure*(October 2011)<http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/management/global-engagement/social-media-procedures.html>.

- Investigate the use of Twitter hash tags and lists and think about how these can be used as teaching and learning or research tools, investigating what established users are doing with these tools.
- Consider using a unique hash tag for your class group, for example #adminlaw101, and instruct students to include the hash tag in their Tweets around the class topic.
- Some academics use Twitter as a way of making announcements, or posting leads to current developments relevant to the class topic (in addition to, or in support of the online learning management system).

If embedding Twitter into subject design, existing literature concerning the use of computer-mediated discussions in teaching may assist. This includes the instruction (and the ground rules) involving Twitter. In particular, see substantial literature around the community of inquiry framework approach to online discussions.[57]

Most learning management systems incorporate a blog that can be used in subject design to promote student learning,[58] however based on our own experience, blogging independently of the formal curriculum has proved an excellent way to understand how this medium can be incorporated into instructional design. Our own blogging demonstrates to students how this form of expression can be undertaken.

There are however many scholarly legal blogs available to showcase almost every legal topic to students as a means of connecting students with a wider world of discipline knowledge and evidence of applied legal thinking.[59] As with Twitter, such blogs can be linked via the learning management system and students can follow these as they see fit, contributing to students developing their own personal learning environment.

V. Conclusion

The evolution of the academy and the nature of the contemporary student and graduate, is never far from the national conversation. In the law school, evidence is mounting as to the impact of increasing student disengagement with their cohort and with a sense of professional or discipline identity.[60] Likewise, the capacity of academic staff to engage in multiple roles of teaching, research and engagement is stretched. While the internet and its tools are not a panacea for the woes of the academy, they do afford a range of opportunities for a more engaged scholarly community. In the authors' experience, both Twitter (microblogging) and blogging open a global conversation about the law, about learning and indeed about anything of interest.

These social media platforms can be used creatively to supplement conventional educational practice to generate collaborative communications beyond the limitations of physical classes

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57 For an introduction to the community of inquiry framework, see: D Randy Garrison and Walter Archer, 'A Theory of Community of Inquiry', in Michael G Moore (ed), *Handbook of Distance Education* (2nd ed, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 77. For examples of studies involving the community of inquiry framework, see: JB Arbaugh, Arthur Bangert, and Martha Cleveland-Innes, 'Subject Matter Effects and the Community of Inquiry (COI) Framework: An Exploratory Study' (2010) 12(1-2) *The Internet and Higher Education* 37; Walter Archer, 'Beyond Online Discussions: Extending the Community of Inquiry Framework to Entire Courses' (2010) 13(1) *Internet and Higher Education* 69; Karen C Williams, Kari Morgan, and Bruce A Cameron, 'How Do Students Define Their Roles and Responsibilities in Online Learning Group Projects?' (2011) 32(1) *Distance Education* 49.

58 Black, above n 15.

59 Melissa Castan, *Finding Australian Law Blogs* (28 April, 2012) Amicae Curiae<http://amicaecuriae.com/2012/04/28/finding-australian-law-blogs/>.

60 Carole Silver, Amy Garver and Lindsay Watkins, 'Unpacking the Apprenticeship of Professional Identity and Purpose: Insights from the Law School Survey of Student Engagement' (2011) 17 *The Journal of the Legal Writing Institute* 373; Molly O'Brien, Stephen Tang and Kath Hall, 'No Time to Lose: Negative Impact on Law Student Wellbeing May Begin in Year One' (2011) 2(2) *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* 49.

or traditional printed media, allowing even the most reticent first-year student to engage with an appellate judge, and the law lecturer to reach an expanded community of practice. These platforms can provide additional forums for professional development and greatly expand legal networks and resources. Thus we advocate these platforms as a means of enhancing the multiplexity of students' educational engagement, developing a variety of roles and connections amongst their networks in order to support their learning. Our own experience in these networks demonstrates the capacity for collaborative and connected intellectual discourse to arise, as well as a multiplex, supportive and collegiate environment within which to learn and of course to share.