

Facebook in higher education: An Auto ethnographic journey entering into edu-social space

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Abstract

This researcher uses auto ethnography within an education context. The author explains their experiences in attempting to research Facebook and other websites and innovation in their organisational setting. They propose that Facebook be used as an effective teaching and learning platform. Their research is best derived from a methodology that enables an analysis of her lived experiences of the using Facebook for educational purposes. Readers are approached through the narrative genre that tangibly illustrates the research paradigm they proposed and engages in. By co-constructing the auto ethnography as they proceeds in their research, the validity of their research is enhanced. It is proposed that the impact of their writing and of the readings they cite, in this auto ethnography on the use of Facebook, is at least as effective as is the cognitive impact of mainstream objectivist organisational research into educational teaching and learning platforms.

Keywords: higher education, social media, edu-social space, teaching and learning environment

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INTRODUCTION

With more than a thousand different social media platforms, social networking has become increasingly popular amongst students and academic staff at universities worldwide. Being connected with students has become the most important and valuable intervention in the student-centered approach of many academics in higher education. Essoungou (2010:3) pointed out that African Facebook (FB) users of all

cultures and races now number over 17 million, with 15% of the continent's inhabitants using this tool on a frequent basis. The study also suggests that Africans predominantly use their mobile phones to visit social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as well as reading news and sending and reading e-mails.

Mansfield (2010:1) estimated that in 2010, there were approximately 10 to 12 million WAP-

enabled cell phone users in South Africa. Seggie (2010:2) reported that almost half a million phones in South Africa are primarily used to access the Internet. Student Village and Interact RDT, two leading youth marketing agencies in South Africa, reported in 2010 that 78% of South African students access the Internet via their mobile phones.

African cell phone users are coupling their cell phone usage with Internet usage, and in particular social media usage. The global trend towards mobile Internet usage is also prominent amongst South African youth. Makoe (2010:2) makes the point that “using mobile devices to facilitate and encourage collaborative learning is even more appropriate in this context because in most black South African cultures, group interaction is a strong factor determining values and social interaction. Each member of the community has a responsibility to recognize his or her obligation to acknowledge the needs of the others.”

Facebook has become the answer to many of the communication shortcomings of my Public Relations students, and being such a popular social media platform, it is used via “smart phones” and most students now have access to daily communication with academic staff and with their peers.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND REFLECTIVE WRITING AS A MODE OF ENQUIRY INTO NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I decided to present an autoethnographical journey to raise some awareness of the different issues involved in using social media networks in teaching and learning in three different higher education institutions, and my personal experiences thereof at Monash South Africa, Vaal University of Technology and North West University. During the past ten odd years I have been writing up these amazing experiences as part of my reflective practice (Bolton:2005) and as a mode of inquiry (Richardson:1997 & 2000). The memoirs and reflections helped me to keep focus on what I believe could work, and what was less successful. This approach was supported by the work of Ellis and Bochner (2000:744) when they comment on the value of narratives: “(they) create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection,

fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence, trying to preserve or restore the continuity and coherence of life’s unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one’s meaning and values into question.”

It was essential for me to open up communication channels between the students and myself, and to share both educational and social experiences in this edu-social space created by myself on the Facebook social media platform. My teaching philosophy is strongly focused on uplifting disadvantaged learners to a new level, where they are motivated and inspired by the knowledge that they gather and create inside and outside the classroom environment.

Stanley (1992:14) explained that the term “the auto/biographical I” refers to “the way in which there is no simplistic, innocent self at work in writing subjectively, the individual is always closely articulated with others.” My journey would not have been successful without the dedication of my students, who went on this discovery with me when I started off using Facebook as a teaching platform.

Varcoe, Rodney and McCormick (2003:14) define the *genre* of autoethnography as a growing recourse using personal experiences and life writings to identify the many layers of consciousness that connects the cultural with the personal. This personal journey became an exploration of knowledge, the creation of new teaching styles, a reflection of what was and what can be achieved, and most of all a process of staying in touch with new technology. Roth (2006:15) argues that “... rather than seeing these *genres* as ways of retreating into personal, inner subjectivity, they are an important resource for understanding culture that we can adopt as a means to establish and stabilize inter-subjectivity.”

THE INITIAL STEPS

My journey using Facebook as a teaching and learning platform began more than four years ago when I recognised the need to communicate with my students on a more frequent and effective basis. SMS’s are costly, and I could not get a personalized website set up through the website of the Vaal University of Technology (VUT). At that stage I perceived that migrating from MySpace to Facebook was the route to go for me. Due to the popularity of Facebook and the availability of cell phones amongst the South

African youth, it was almost certain that most of my students would be active Facebook users by the time they register for my specific subjects. In 2010, Alistair Fairweather in an article on the ten biggest Facebook sites mentioned that “for the past four years the Facebook wave has been breaking over South Africa bringing a deluge of excitement, controversy and hype with it. During that time the user base has grown from less than 10 000 to well over three-million people. To put it in context, if our population had grown at the same rate as our Facebook users, there would now be 15-billion South Africans on the planet.” The growth in South African Facebook users made me realise that the Facebook platform could be my road to effective communication with my students, and I was excited to start using it.

Pollara and Zhu (2011:1) recognise that the popularity of Facebook as an Edu-social space has potential, identifying that social media networking sites can promote collaboration and promote learning (Malony 2007:4). My experiences and conversations with students correlated with Selwyn’s (2009:3) claim that social networking “may benefit learners by allowing them to enter new networks of collaborative learning, based around interests and affinities not catered for in the immediate educational environment.” I now had the opportunity to meet up socially with my students, but focusing on their academic growth. In a way I felt guilty that I was now invading their “private social space” with academic matters, sometimes even after hours and over weekends. In informal conversations with students they admitted that they would not go to the SAKAI laboratory, except when they have to do formal assessments, but with Facebook I am “in their faces” all the time, reminding them of their academic responsibilities, and most of the students appreciate the effort made to assist them in their studies.

I started reading up on the use of Facebook as a teaching platform, even though relevant literature on the subject was limited in 2008. Mason (2006:7) argued that “Facebook shares many of the qualities of a good official education technology in its reflective element to use mechanisms for peer feedback and goodness-of-fit with the social context of learning.” Statements like Mason’s inspired me to give it a try and with the prior knowledge of Facebook, I then designed a group page, which I later came to realise was not the optimum route. The

biggest disadvantage of groups was that students had to link up to my personal Facebook site, and then I had to accept every person individually. This was a time-consuming exercise, but I also felt uncomfortable with students being part of my personal circle of Facebook friends. I was determined to keep my Facebook site as private as possible, but by using groups the task became unmanageable. I was, however, resolved to make it work and through trial and tribulation a whole new edu-social world opened up to me! Through various learning cycles, I discovered the most appropriate option in 2012. I guided myself over a period of four years according to Kolb’s (1984:36) learning cycles and the students and myself went through the phase of experiencing a phase, and then reflecting on a new experience. This was important, specifically as my students at VUT had never experienced any form of e-learning. In the process I started building a new model for e-learning and student-centered learning at VUT, and this provided me with possible answers to our experiences in teaching and learning through Facebook. This was the stage where I could consider all kinds of possibilities, and a whole new world opened up for me. The exciting part was to put the theory into practice, and both students and I were very excited to start using it.

The Kolb process assisted me in going through the reflection-theorising loop, figuring out what we did, and adjusting the model until it fitted for a specific group of students. During the 2012 academic year I will be using a simpler way, creating a page that students can link up with and ‘like’, thus becoming part of the group and receiving all information. The biggest advantage of this is that students do not have to go through my own personal Facebook site to access a group, but merely ‘like’ the subject page created for them.

The user-friendliness, accessibility, cost-effectiveness and the popularity of Facebook is growing rapidly, globally. New applications are created daily, and support structures and information pages are available to guide users in using the most appropriate tool for specific tasks. The website on Facebook terms https://www.facebook.com/page_guidelines.php provides detailed explanations on the array of applications available. This is worth studying before newcomer lecturers want to venture into creating sites for their students. It would also be advisable to join sites such as “All Facebook”

(<http://www.allfacebook.com/facebook-page-or-group-2010-07>) and research as much as possible about the latest applications, effective usage of different applications, or making use of the reciprocity learning when co-users share their ideas and experiences with the rest of the global Facebook family.

MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY TAKES ON A NEW DIMENSION

My teaching is based on the philosophy of student-centered learning, which is less authoritarian in helping students to “train the mind”. The environment has more contemporary relevance and focuses more on preparing the students for an ever-changing future (Sadker & Zittleman 2010:207). I was ready to place the student at the centre of the educational process so that we could work together so as to determine how best information can be accessed and understood. My main aim also included a vision to get students to improve their society and to make student’s explore their own individuality through student- centered learning.

Dunlap, Enloe and Gagnon (1998:16) describe learning circles as “small communities of learners among teachers and others who come together intentionally for the purpose of supporting each other in the process of learning”. I am a great believer in the power of learning circles, particularly in my field of teaching, as students have to be able to communicate freely, be creative and work successfully in small groups. My students have reaped the rewards of learning circles over many years now, and I have seen how the development of individuals within this arrangement helped students progress in the industries where they practice their professions.

Facebook assisted me in creating a progressive classroom, where students are working in learning circles, where they express their individual ideas, share thoughts and talk freely about topics within the bounds of as well as outside of the curriculum, thereby creating meaning and new knowledge in small academic structures. It was also important for me to build the curriculum around the experiences, prior knowledge, interests and abilities of the students and in the process also to encourage students to work cooperatively in their learning circles, tapping resources and sharing useful information with those in their circle.

Students form their own learning circles (a maximum of ten students per circle) and create their own Facebook pages on which they can, as the learning circle, interact and share academic information within the learning circle, as well as with other groups within the class or with those registered for the same qualification. Taking into consideration the nature of public relations and communication science, each learning circle creates their own little cyber company, with a corporate logo and identity, a vision and mission and load photographs and other promotional material, thus covering multiple topic activities within the various fields of the curriculum.

Students get the opportunity to integrate several subjects on their pages, and in the end have a better idea of the bigger picture of the course structure and how their learning can enhance their future experiences in real-life situations. Thought-provoking ideas posted on their walls augment their reading, and games such as Farmville and Smurville are used to illustrate business principles. These include financial planning, time management and punctuation as well as general management of their cyber properties. Players also increase their vocabulary on crops and trees, and understand the challenges of farming better. Rice (2010:4) identified the value of the interactive ‘work’ a player has to perform in Farmville. Players are required to have focused attention to progress and in the process they can absorb some pedagogical content in a more effective way than through television or books.

There are however serious cases of addiction and criminal activities documented where people got obsessed with playing online games such as Farmville. Lydia Chai (2010), an Internet blogger shared her experiences with online gamers and warned against addiction, particularly of Farmville. Students are however warned against these addictions and help is available when they become obsessed with the game.

THE CLOSE PROXIMITY OF INFORMATION ... IT IS NOW JUST A THUMBNAIL AWAY...

Links to interactive websites offer educational challenges for students and can develop multiple-intelligence. During the first two weeks of the academic year, online learning styles inventories are made available to my entire student population of about 300 students, so that they can gain a better understanding of

themselves and how they can determine the way they prefer to study, and how they can learn and process information.

VARK (Flemming), an online diagnostic test is freely available on the Internet at <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp> and there is information available on what the test consist of, why it is used, and how students can test themselves. The results are available immediately, and the site leads students to more information on particular learning styles. Through actions such as this, I assist students to manage their academic careers, and they also get to understand the value of study methods and styles.

The Student Counseling Department at VUT also assists students in developing specific strategies that enhance student's learning potential. They put in an effort to develop a stimulating and exciting supportive teaching and learning environment on campus which helps us in enhancing student learning on multiple levels. They focus particularly on engaging with the potential of students and in the process they assist the students to achieve their academic and personal goals, creating responsive and responsible higher education learners.

Dunn and Dunn (1978:34) advise teachers to use the "meshing hypothesis" and assess the learning styles of their students and to adapt their classroom methods to best fit each student's particular learning style. Taking learning styles into consideration has many advantages ranging from keeping the styles in mind when developing curricula, formative and summative assessment tasks, learning circle activities as well as general class interactions.

Dexter and Petch (2006) reiterate the importance of investigating the scope of student support looking at the advance and scaling up of e-learning and distance learning provision. Student support systems have to be extended and deepened, considering alternative methods in planning and implementation. My Facebook experiences became model-driven, and I focused on an holistic approach working in a joint venture with the VUT Student Counseling Department. One of the biggest advantages for me is the opportunities Facebook provides for students to speak to me on confidential issues that they would not talk about face-to-face.

Immediate intervention through the counselors is now available, which can resolve issues much quicker and can identify problems almost immediately.

AND THEN CAME WEB 2.0...

Since the advent of Web 2.0 new technology opened up more effective communication channels for academics and students. Anderson (2007:4) defines Web 2.0 as "the common applications/services such as blogs, video sharing, social networking and podcasting—a more socially connected Web in which people can contribute as much as they can consume."

My personal practical experiences with e-learning and online learning include the use of various Media Learning Systems, including WebCT, Moodle, Sakai and Blackboard. These MLS applications that were used at institutions where I taught and studied, are all classified as Web 2.0 technologies.

Web 2.0 technologies such as Social Networking Sites (SNS) are now used to enhance information sharing, creativity and collaboration among users, particularly in higher education.

Social Networking Services (SNS) have become more popular amongst organisations and individuals, and these sites provide a convenient and effective communication platform in the higher education environment. These services are used to chat, socialise, network and debate. Although there are a multitude of these social sites available, I found a safe haven in Facebook, a SNS created by Mark Zuckerberg to help students of Harvard University to link up with each other. Zuckerberg (2011:5) described Facebook as an "...online directory that connects people through social networks at colleges and universities." Facebook is expanding daily and everybody with a valid e-mail address can now have their own personalized Facebook page, no matter who you are and where you are.

Gemmill and Peterson (2006:23) noted that socialising via the Internet has become increasingly important for young adults. In a study by DeBell and Chapman (2006:19) they identified adolescents and young adults as the current heaviest computer and Internet users. Boyd and Ellison (2008:6) identified SNS as the latest online communication tools which allow

users to create a public or private profile through which they can communicate globally with people in their network.

One of my biggest academic aspirations was to have open communication channels between my students and myself and amongst students in their own circles as well. Time constraints often limit my face-to-face communication with my students, but with the use of Facebook both parties now have more opportunities to foster positive relationships among and between students and staff. The use of Facebook motivated me to start researching different educational theories, e-learning teaching styles and alternative methods. This research contributes greatly to the richness of the teaching and learning experiences and adds to the excitement and fascination of the “Net Generation” students who now occupy my classrooms.

Tapscott (2010:2) defines the Net Generation as “the young people aged 11 to 31 who have grown up immersed in digital technology.” This generation does not accept a one-way approach to communication and they tend to compare sources before making final decisions.

NOW I HAVE TO ENTERTAIN THE NET GENERATION IN CLASS...

Computer mediated social networks have been developing at an increasing rate, and new platforms are created almost on a daily basis. Time constraints sometimes limit the amount of face-to-face student socialization, Walther (1995:17) found that students who use forms of computer mediated communication may experience more opportunities to develop personal relationships than their face-to-face counterparts.

I was surprised to realize that what I am looking for all started off many years ago with John Dewey (1959) and his progressive understanding of education. It was the foundation of the concept of Community of Inquiry (COI), which motivated me to create a platform that could be of value to all parties in my teaching and learning process. Swan, Garrison and Richardson (2009:3) identified the COI framework as “a process model of online learning which views the online educational experience as arising from the interaction of three presences – social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence.” Facebook

provides all three these presences, and I started studying COI in-depth to link it successfully with the Facebook platform I was creating.

Inquiry and community are at the core of John Dewey’s (1959:28) philosophy and practices and he believed that “the process of inquiry went to the heart of the educative experience and that students would assume responsibility to actively construct and confirm meaning.” My viewpoint on student-centered learning linked up so naturally with the COL framework, and I was excited in developing an environment in which students enjoy the gaining and creation of knowledge on a regular basis.

CAN SOCIAL MEDIA ENHANCE MY TEACHING AND LEARNING STYLES?

Effective communication forms the core of my teaching and learning style, and I came to realize that if I want to implement student-centered learning effectively, both students and I should be able to communicate with each other, as well as with the students in the groups in a highly effective manner. Students now have the opportunity to take charge of their own academic destiny and the relationship between learners is more equitable, which promotes growth in development.

While studying the statistics on mobile usage in Africa, I came to realize that the student population uses mobile technology very effectively and not just to communicate, but also to gather information and forge social relationships through several social media platforms via their cellular phones Dogbevi (2010:2) observed that “...the increase in the number of mobile cellular subscriptions over the last five years has defied all predictions and Africa remains the region with the highest mobile growth rate,” according to an International Telecommunication Union document *Information Society Statistical Profiles 2009: Africa*. My challenge was to find a cost-effective way to use some of these platforms in the teaching and learning environment, making education part of students’ daily mobile usage, and still keep them interested in their academic activities.

Although there are many student learning platforms available, a lack of resources and physical facilities at the university where I work, made it almost impossible for me to use the

SAKAI platform that was available on the campus. Limited resources, outdated equipment and an almost non-existent support system were some of the issues that hampered me in using the official teaching and learning platform of the university.

During my research hours I spent time surfing the Internet and reading academic journals for information on alternative methods I could apply to make the teaching and learning experience more exciting and effective. I joined various Facebook sites related to new technology in higher education. One of the most interesting sites that introduced me to alternative teaching methods was Edutopia (<https://www.facebook.com/edutopia?sk=wall>), which then linked me up with <http://www.web20erc.eu>, a most informative site simplifying Web2.0 specifically for the education environment. <http://www.classroom20.com/>, although an American-based website, helped me a great deal in understanding the new technologies available and how they can be used effectively.

Moving out of the standard textbook into the new world of instant knowledge creation, I then came to realize that Facebook was the most used social media platform by my students. Facebook was also very user-friendly and there was room for me to use it as a teaching and learning platform, and so my journey with Facebook teaching had begun.

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

I want to use this article to share my experiences with academics who would want to venture into using Facebook as a teaching and learning platform in higher education. Four years ago when I created my first academic group on Facebook, limited information was available on Facebook in education compared to information on other educational software packages such as Blackboard, WebCT and Moodle, to name but a few. The formal platforms had online training sessions and manuals, but Facebook was an exciting trail-and-error discovery of a new and innovate way linking students up with their educational needs.

Although I had informal discussions with colleagues on the idea of using Facebook as a teaching platform, most of them were skeptical about it. Keep in mind that four years ago Facebook had very limited options in

comparison with the multitude of applications that can now be linked and used in conjunction with it. Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2007:5) argued that despite all the consequences, “teachers may enhance their credibility among students by signifying an understanding of the contemporary student culture.” In my mind this was the effective use and understanding to social media platforms.

In my field of teaching which includes public relations, communication science and media studies, it is essential not only to understand these new social media tools, but foremost also how to use them effectively. The use of Facebook and other social media platforms to communicate with my students, gave them confidence to use them once they are working in industry, thus having prior knowledge and experience with such tools.

I AM USING FACEBOOK IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS TO COMMUNICATE WITH MY STUDENTS:

It is important to keep the social networking policies of your institution in mind when creating Facebook sites as teaching and learning platforms. I discussed my proposed route with the VUT’ Department of Information Technology, and kept in touch with them throughout the process. A variety of applications are available through Facebook and these add value both to my own and the students’ experience:

Event Calendar	I use the Facebook Event Calendar to remind students of deadlines, test dates, field trips and other important academic and social events on campus
Wall Posts	Both students and I are using this facility to share thumbnails of video clips, images, news stories. The thumbnail with take you directly to the Internet site where the information is hosted, thus avoiding plagiarism or copyright of any documents.
News Feeds	Through ‘news feeds’ students can follow an array of local and international news sites and can get up-to-date news. In my subject field, Media Studies, I let students choose two local

	and two international news feeds, giving them a balanced view of news.
Book Reviews	I provide students with titles of additional reading material available on a specific subject. Students cannot afford to buy all the extra reading material, and here, in particular they can use downloadable e-books and Google books which come free.
Farmville	There are a variety of strategic Facebook games that help students to plan, structure, budget, manage time and many other social skills they acquire when managing their cyber farm successfully. I make a point of warning students against addictions when playing these games. Time management is essential here!
Creation of own resources	Learning circles can start their own 'pages' on which they can communicate, gather information and work in cyber space on their tasks, without physically being together as a group. I recommend this option as they then have no excuse for not getting together at a specific time at a specific place.
Foreign language exposure	At VUT students take French as an additional language. They can link up with Facebook sites providing them with flash cards and French speaking people who will have cyber conversations with my students. This will assist them in becoming confident with the use of the language.
Link up with politicians, celebrities and products or services	Students will get the opportunity to see how these products and services are marketed through social media sites. They can follow specific pages by linking through the 'like' button to get regular updates. I recommend specific politicians in the beginning, then students can search interesting politicians

	and celebrities of their own choice.
Multimedia sharing	I introduce students to Slideshare, a platform where electronic slide presentations are shared, and students have the opportunity to search for alternative slide presentations on a specific topic.
Class notes	I post the next topic of the next class on the site to give students the opportunity to read up about the topic of discussion.
Messages	I have the opportunity to speak to students individually through this facility. Students sometimes discuss issues through this facility that they do not want to discuss face-to-face. I also use the facility to give students a cyber pat on the back, or to discuss class performance and other personal issues that will not be appropriate to discuss in class.

CONCLUSION

Using Facebook as a teaching and learning platform was a long and winding road, with lots of trials and tribulations. The relatively smooth road was not created overnight. I travelled a road filled with potholes and rockfalls on a daily basis. Throughout the detours and slippery roads, I still find and explore new and innovative avenues in which I can present information to my students through this cyber platform.

Changing my teaching philosophy to be in line with the Facebook platform also prompted me to reflect thoroughly on my present views and operations. It also required structured research to stay acquainted with present styles and to adapt accordingly. I now have a more progressive classroom with students who manage their studies more effectively and are able to work successfully in small groups. My students complete evaluations on their Facebook experiences every semester, and I scrutinise the results to guide me in expanding, exploring and providing new and exciting

material for the next semester. Both students and I can source and create knowledge more effectively as information is readily available. A thumbnail is a clip art link to the specific website, providing a pathway to academic information, without the risk of plagiarising any material. Obtaining new knowledge and skills is fast, effective, and they are only a few clicks of the mouse away. It is however very important to teach the students the skills to be able to distinguish between valuable and trustworthy information and garbage being uploaded on the Internet all the time.

The Net Generation has the advantage of sourcing information at a much faster pace, but they can also, very easily, get distracted by the quantity of information in cyberspace. Creating a community of inquiry inside as well as outside my classrooms was priority for me, and through proper training and practical experience, my students became part of such a community. Students can source information easily, and they can lift the standard of knowledge creation to a new level, feeling good about it, as they are now in charge of their own academic destinies. Social media and its applications provided me with the opportunity to enhance my teaching and learning style, breaking the barrier of teaching very big classes and not being able to communicate with the students in an effective way. With so many students linked up on social media platforms via their mobile phones, e-learning and m-learning (the use of mobile telephone devices) has become so much more accessible.

Create individual pages or groups for each subject, and do not permit access to them through your own personal Facebook site. It is essential to keep your Facebook relationship at school on a professional level and rather communicate with students through their respective groups or pages. All users must also keep etiquette and Internet protocol in mind using the platform in a courteous and ethical way.

Using Facebook as a teaching and learning platform requires dedication and commitment from both the teacher and the students and regular updating of the site is important as students might lose interest. Posting too many links and cluttering can also be dangerous as it can lead to confusion and information overload. With the continuous development of new FB

applications for educational purposes, limitations must be realised. Like every other tool, FB is only one of a continuously expanding selection that is available to add value and support inside and outside of the classroom. I use social media platforms not just for educational purposes but it is important for me to increase the flow of communication between students and myself and it helps to improve both attainment of knowledge and motivation. Facebook provides me and my students with a platform where we can interact beyond the constraints of the classroom, and with which both parties provide personalised feedback and support. Educational support groups are available on Facebook, and it is interesting and important to share your experiences and reflections with others who are using Facebook as a teaching and learning platform. I have learned so much from other users who have tried and tested new applications, and from their experiences, I can then evaluate whether the specific application is essential for me to use. Students in particular do not realise that they have an Internet footprint and they do not realise that some of their postings can be viewed by the whole cyber community. In the initial phases of creating a site for students, I request them to Google themselves and study the information that is available about themselves on the Internet. In most cases they are very surprised about the information available and it gives them the opportunity to become responsible cyber citizens.

Although Facebook has been deemed one of the evils of the 21st Century, we have to realize that the Net Generation (NG) is now the generation of students who are attending our classes. NG's overindulge in a diet of communication, social media, entertainment and any other form of electronic media. What makes them a different breed is that they are master multi-taskers, they can use any social network effectively, they can work any electronic device without an instruction manual and are the first to rush off and buy any new electronic gadget. As they grow older, they are surrounded by more and more electronic devices and they "live" in the social media sphere where they meet and gather old and new friends, they text message all the time, and Twitter and Facebook their days and nights away...or so it seems to me!

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