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Abstract

For some years academics have debated the role in higher education of Facebook, the world's most extensive social networking site. At first there was enthusiasm—it was a new tool that could be 'repurposed' for education; then, as Facebook became more widespread, its use seemed less than opportune. But now, with so many students already engaged before they even come to a university, perhaps it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Facebook is as natural to education as the commute, the computer, and everything else which students 'bring'. This paper first presents a summary of what Facebook affords, by way of its design and use, for online communication and networking, demonstrating the central role of reciprocal acts of attention exchange in this system. It then analyses, through a critical reading of research into Facebook and education, the way Facebook challenges traditional understandings of university education and the relationships between teachers and students. It concludes that, however we might seek to use Facebook in higher education (and there are many reasons we might), its use will always be shaped by—and indeed give rise to—a blurring of the traditional boundaries between formal and informal education.

In this paper I will first summarise the particular (even unique) status which Facebook has achieved in online communications, suggesting that Facebook is now helping define how we understand the Internet's social effects (rather than *being* one of those effects). I will outline the key technological features of Facebook, while also indicating how they are moderated, produced and understood through individual and social uses, and emphasise that Facebook is a system which produces a visible and persistent social network through the work performed within it, by its users.

I will then review some of the research done that explores the use of Facebook in education. My aim here is not to cover the field of work, nor summarise types, nor to identify effective and less effective examples. Rather, I want through this review to inquire more critically into the complex and conflicted response that university education has to Facebook – both welcoming it and concerned about it, seeking to use it yet wondering whether it is the right thing to do. In this analysis I focus heavily on the way that Facebook might be seen as blurring the boundaries between formal and informal learning. I take this approach to avoid giving a simplistic answer to the commonly asked question: 'should academics use Facebook in their teaching?' Such a question can only be resolved through practice, attentive to context and avoiding generalisations. I am, therefore, attempting to create the context of thought within which such practice might proceed, concluding that the existence of Facebook, the 'problem' of Facebook as it might be put, refashions academic sensibilities towards students, online and flexible learning, and the use of time and place to manage the experiential dyad of learning-teaching.

A Facebook primer

Facebook's origins, as a form of campus dormitory dating / networking site, are now well established, as is its extraordinary rise to being one of the most widely used online services globally. While its initial connection to a university setting might, at first, have made it seem naturally appropriate for educational uses, the service is now so different that we should not draw any direct connection between it and higher education (and indeed be cautious of early research into its educational applications: see Roblyer et al. 2010, p. 135 for a useful summary of Facebook's history and development as seen from the perspective of educational research). Similarly, while Facebook became significant in a wider context as a social networking service (though, notably, it described itself as a "social utility" and continues to deprecate the specific 'network' appellation), it now involves far more than this simple phrase might imply. As Facebook has grown in size and scope, it has added more features that mean we must either redefine online social networking so as now to include all that can be done via Facebook, and in the manner in which Facebook works; or we should recognise that Facebook is a new kind of online entity, with many features and uses, of which social networking is just one, albeit significant part. As part of this 'redefinition' of social networking *in light of* Facebook, we should recognise that Facebook has been at the forefront of the now-common interweaving of online communications (for many years construed as a separate dimension, distinct from 'offline' life) with the everyday lives of people, in places and with faces, who have just one social network, *more or less* online depending on time and circumstances (Ellison et al., 2011).

Facebook is no longer one of several competing but similar online services: it is unique. Nothing else works in the same manner and with the same scope (nearly 1 billion monthly users as of June 2012, with more than 500 million active daily; and more than 10 million in Australia: Socialbakers, 2012; Facebook, 2012). As one recent review of some 400 scholarly articles put it: "The sheer online ubiquity of Facebook is astounding" (Wilson et al., 2012, p. 203). Rather like Google, Wikipedia, and more recently Twitter, Facebook has no effective imitators (except in limited cases where linguistic and national differences produce equivalent but discrete services, as in the case of Weibo in China and VK in Russia). Google and Facebook indeed essentially provide two different, sometimes competing but also complementary arguments, for 'what' the Internet should be, each recognising the benefit of the other for its own business while still always seeking developments that privilege its own approach. Google attempts to be at work everywhere within the web, whereas Facebook, quite deliberately, transcends the normal distinctions between 'web' and 'websites'. It *is* the web for many people, especially when they are using mobile applications with restricted options for multi-tasking. While Facebook may not occupy all of a user's time online, nor achieve all that must be done, it certainly offers (or pretends) to be all-encompassing. Certainly it is seductive, in its openness, in suggesting that what is lacking in Facebook can be made up by constant efforts by users to enhance its comprehensiveness by distributing, through their online Facebook networks, information available elsewhere online. Facebook also offers itself as something equivalent to the Internet, through the extensive suite of communications tools which can take the place of many other equivalents, all in a single neat package.

It is essential to grasp that Facebook is, before anything else, a business, and the economy of Facebook is all about attention. It is, perhaps, the most exquisitely rendered realisation of the early hopes of the early web entrepreneurs, who wished to capture an attentive audience through free content, exchanging their 'eyeballs' for advertising revenue. At such a site, multitudes of users would spend hours a day, never wandering

the web and getting distracted, but consistently attending to that one site and all of the advertisements therein. For most businesses that tried it, this 'old media' model was doomed before it began, failing to understand the transformation of everyday life wrought by the Internet. Facebook, by contrast, worked however because first, all of the content is provided by users themselves (at no cost to Facebook). Second, the behaviour of those users within the system creates the rich data *about* those users which enables Facebook to target advertisements, generating greater revenue per advertisement. Third, Facebook's inherent sociality (it works because of the people one knows within it) harnesses network effects not only so that the network is successful *as* it grows but also by creating potential that attracts people (including advertisers) to it. Facebook is not the only way to make money online, nor the only way to mobilise the attention economy (Amazon and Google, respectively, would suggest equally if not more secure approaches): however, for the specific form of network aggregated, user-generated content, data-mining, advertising intensive business, Facebook is without peer (for a recent analysis and summary of the various dimensions of attention in contemporary internet practices see Terranova, 2012; also Hill, 2012, pp. 110-117; and Skågeby, 2009).

There are several distinct features of Facebook which underpin its operation as a key social communication technology. There is the *profile*, consisting of information identifying a user and, effectively, presenting them in the manner they see fit for other users: this profile is relatively static, but the actions within Facebook also help to provide the data for one's profile (such as the friends you have made). A Facebook *page* serves as a profile for organisations, with some differences which reflect the attempt by the service to provide a form of web publishing for entities other than individuals. Second there is the *social network of friends* with whom a user is connected so as to privilege interactivity with those friends (what they can see; what you see of their activity). One does not, however, 'see' the network so much as its effects, principally through the *newsfeed* which consists of the material regularly posted to Facebook by users – the newsfeed is best understood as the aggregation, presented to any one user, of all the posts by other users to whom they are connected. Note that posts and post-related behaviour cover several categories (text, photos, videos, links, shared content, tags, likes, and comments on all of these). A single user's own posts effectively become part of their profile, along with other content, through a *timeline* (though this feature can be avoided in some cases and there are more significant editing tools than in previous years). There are *applications* which serve as specific forms of publishing and interaction, most notably games but also many other 'structured' interactions, normally conducted in a relatively public manner. There are *communication channels*, chat and video and email-type messaging, for private interactions. Finally, there are *groups* to which one belongs, either public or private, and which create a more coherent space for collective interaction, compared with the individuated network behaviour more generally presented in a newsfeed.

For most educational purposes, it would be groups (probably kept private), plus some of the private communications, that would seem most obviously important but, of course, using Facebook will necessarily involve its other features, even in finding ways to avoid them. Groups contain some limited capability for exchanging documents, organising and managing events, as well as a shared space for collective discussion (effectively a newsfeed from and for all group members). Therefore groups are a kind of limited collaboration application, inbuilt within Facebook, but kept somewhat distinct through the capacity to keep group and other activity separate.

It is also important to understand that Facebook operates autonomously through information that the system holds about individuals and their connections. While the

features described above are designed into the system, so too are the prompts which Facebook can provide to enhance the degree of use by people. Research, for example, has shown that the reminders to users of birthdays that their friends are about to have increases cross-contact between those users (Wilson et al., 2012, p. 209). Similarly, Facebook enthusiastically identifies and recommends potential friends for its users based on the patterns of friendship which it can discern from the data of all users. The system also analyses the patterns of interactions between friends to attempt to prioritise in a newsfeed items which seem to be more interesting or useful based on previous actions. The automation of 'addressing' (when the system prompts you to send requests to all your friends) also demonstrates how Facebook, as well as allowing *you* to manage one's social network, also attempts to manage it for you, encouraging you to participate in it in ways which suit Facebook's design. Equally, Facebook attempts to draw content *into* itself through the growing reliance of other websites on technologies which allow their content to be posted directly to Facebook, through the Open Graph system. Ries (cited in Wilson et al. 2012, p. 215) concludes that Facebook has, therefore, become the central clearinghouse for information sharing online, simply because so many users interact with so much fragmented content *through* Facebook rather than through the original websites.

Facebook has additional features emerging less from its fundamental design and more from its contemporary usage. For example, Facebook is increasingly used by people via mobile, always-connected devices, though the format it is given through mobile apps is not as usable or richly featured as through a web browser. Mobile use brings with it a strong emphasis on 'push' notifications, with users regularly and instantly notified of changes and updates in Facebook. Because of the cameras inside most mobile devices, Facebook use in practice tends to promote the sharing of images (one reason for the company's recent acquisition of the digital photography company Instagram). Indeed it is important to recall that, whatever the technical design of Facebook features, they work only in concert with users' preferences, social norms, and other features. For example, Facebook can be used to promote attention to other web services (such as Twitter) which users prefer, though Facebook attempts to limit this cross-connection through various technical means. Thus, while there are many applications which offer something 'extra' inside Facebook, their use is limited compared to general Facebook activity. Similarly, the general tenor and structure of Facebook communications between users, through posts, tends to be brief, episodic and, in many cases, largely without substance *except* insofar of demonstrating that a person has noticed what the original user has posted. There is a lot of sharing of links, photos and other material from elsewhere. It is possible to use the technologies of Facebook for in-depth, complicated exchange: but the social and cultural norms are not to do so.

Fundamentally, Facebook is a system for communicating to others the interests, passions, pleasures and business of the individual, 'showing off' the self and thus creating, sustaining and enriching connections through that communication. It might appear that the social network is the *means* by which communication occurs: but this is a very narrow reading. In fact, communication (most often in the form of declarations of only marginally dialogic intent) is the raw material from which the network is made or, perhaps, the process through which it is made persistent and tangible. The principal feature of Facebook, therefore, is not within the system so to speak, nor even determined by its use: the principal feature is each user and how they come to be known (perhaps too well known) by the 'public' with whom they connect. As a result, Facebook tends to be a place where missteps, mistakes and alarms all centre on the visibility of individuals and organisation *linked to* information that might otherwise not

be associated with them or which, while acceptable in some contexts, is unacceptable in others. The problems with Facebook are normally understood as breaches of privacy (see Raynes-Goldie, 2010 for a good analysis) which, while partially the responsibility of users, are largely an effect of a system whose generality precludes effective use by people of specific social contexts to control the dissemination of information. The problems occur when information suitable for *some* people to know become known to all and where information can be disclosed so long as it is not linked to the individual finds its connection *to* that individual, caused by the collapse of defined contexts in a single system that networks together people from different contexts (Hull et al., 2011). However, I would argue that this problem is more usefully understood as excessive publicity, not too little privacy, because such a conceptualisation more accurately reflects the cause, which is an 'overflow' in attempting to attract attention. The lack of context is exactly what makes Facebook work and why it is popular.

In conclusion, then, Facebook is best understood as a system that attempts to capture as much of a user's online behaviour as possible, either directly or indirectly. It gives users a way of offering themselves to others, to gain attention, as well as enabling easy reciprocity in the giving of attention. In doing so, it enables users to become more or less significant nodes in networks of attentive interaction, by which the self is understood, presented and validated in its pursuit of interests, expressions of ideas and everyday actions. Facebook enables our lives (represented through information) to be a public performance and thus makes our identity the consequence of our actions as much as its origin.

Universities, learning and Facebook

I want to focus now on analysing several examples of the way that Facebook's use in educational settings has been researched, looking at what has been found, but more importantly attempting to get a better understanding of how educators are thinking about this technology and its uses. I do not believe that there is any necessary correlation between a single example of its educational use and any other putative use: each experience of using it will differ depending on context and purpose. However, the research to date reveals the broader state of affairs in which university academics seek ways of responding to the rise of this enormously popular, all-embracing aspect of our daily lives in connected societies.

Baran (2010) reported on her effort to build a Facebook-based component into a traditional campus-based learning experience. Noting that there have been many previous discussions of the informal benefits of student and teacher communication through Facebook, Baran's goal was to explore its use in a *formal* setting, as if it were equivalent to activities normally conducted in class. In that setting, grades were assigned for work done in Facebook and students were required to participate, with tasks being clearly identified by the teacher. Three findings from this research are significant. First, Baran concluded that "The student–student dimension may be more important than the student–content and student–teacher dimensions". Second, she found that "students may tend to be more interested in the social than the teaching dimensions of tools such as Facebook … [and] the higher degree of social presence may well be one of the greatest contributions of such tools. However, because of the informal basis of Facebook, the students may not necessarily perceive this as a formally planned element of the teaching and learning." Third, it was important to plan for the "tensions that may arise between the formal and the informal uses of social networking tools in education".

What interests me about this research is the way that Baran frames both the problem she is seeking to solve *and* the results she obtains in terms of the boundaries

between formal and informal learning or, perhaps, between *instruction* and learning. She points to the conservative, traditional nature of the Turkish university system in which she works, in which there is limited experience of online education as well as strong expectations from both students and teachers about the subordination of the learner to the instructor because of the expertise and authority of the latter. She interprets her results in terms of the challenges to get students using Facebook in a way that better reflects the formality required for effective learning (when they are naturally using it in other ways outside of this specific instance), while also approving the way that Facebook made the experience more social. In other words, Baran discovered that the principal effect of blended learning was to make the boundaries between informal and formal learning less distinct, with both positive and negative implications. Similarly, Jones et al. (2010) concluded that the central challenge for the use of any kind of social software with students was its capacity to disrupt established boundaries between study and other aspects of life (particularly on campus). While noting that such a distinction is usually criticised by pedagogic theory as less effective for learning, nevertheless students were often reluctant to accept this disruption to the distinction between the two forms.

This interplay between formal and informal becomes clearer from a much more extensive survey of Facebook use by students within a broader context of education, focusing on the general experience of students at university. Madge et al. (2009) surveyed first-year students at the University of Leicester in the UK and discovered that the students commenced their studies with a normalised understanding of Facebook as a means to stay in touch with friends made earlier (while at school) who were now no longer co-present; they also used Facebook, to some extent, to begin forming friendships with other students at the university without first having met them in person. The research showed Facebook was highly valued as "social glue", helping students to settle into life at university, especially in relation to social events; these findings confirmed the early and ground-breaking work of Ellison et al (2007) who found a clear correlation between Facebook use and the creation of positive social capital for American university students (distinct from general Internet use). This benefit was, however, realised only in the context of many other social networking practices "and clearly face-to-face relationships and interactions remain significant". More importantly, these researchers also found that students had mixed opinions about the consequence and value of Facebook for learning. While many students, over the course of their first varsity year, became comfortable using Facebook for informal learning (principally by discussing, while out of class, assignments, tasks and other formal requirements with other students), there were more divided opinions about its formal use. Many respondents wished to keep Facebook use separate from formal education, variously deprecating any contact with tutors, or university administrators. Even those who were more positive about teachers using Facebook to provide course-related communication principally wanted its use to be limited to administrative announcements which would take advantage of the timely delivery of information.

Madge et al. (2009) concluded, in part, that universities ought to do "something" with Facebook which closely correlates with the general conditions of its use by students:

> Facebook appears to be such an important social tool used by new students to aid their settling-in process, higher education institutions could sensibly and gently act as a catalyst for this process for pre-registration students by promoting the existence of accommodation/hall and departmental Facebook groups (p. 152).

However, in concert with earlier analysis by Selwyn (2007), these researchers also argued that universities and teachers need to be very careful about formalising the use of Facebook and should instead recognise the opportunities it affords for increased informal learning, organised and conducted by students on their own initiative, in response to what is being done in formal instruction. Teachers staying 'out' of Facebook might actually be more effective at promoting learning than if they were to get too involved.

Nevertheless, even a decision to avoid Facebook is, still, a form of engagement, an attempt to solicit from this social technology some kind of learning advantage. Madge et al., and others who have a similar perspective, seek to harness Facebook by making it distinct from the formal learning environment and thus tacitly encouraging students to deploy their social networks to promote better learning *outside* of that formal place, transferring initiative from teachers to the learners themselves. The call to link the spatially ambiguous form of Facebook (whose informational exchanges appear all in the same space but refer to various otherwise bounded physical places) *to* a place (residential halls) while refusing the link to another place (the classroom) is an attempt to map within Facebook known spatial divisions presumed by academics to have significance in the general process of university education.

DeSchryver et al. (2009) reported research into the use of Facebook in a very different context. Starting from the presumption that "Learning Management Systems such as Blackboard and Moodle do not inherently promote a sense of community, social presence, and frequent interaction in the way that Facebook does", they tested the idea that the use of Facebook "for the discussion elements of an online undergraduate educational psychology course" would produce different results, noting that more than 90% of students already were using Facebook. The research involved randomised assignment of students to either Moodle or Facebook for the discussion component, while all other activities occurred within Moodle. They found that there was no significant difference in the length or frequency of posts in either group. Their analysis also included interviews with students, however, which revealed why perhaps no significant differences occurred. First, students indicated that they did not like having to divide their time between Moodle and Facebook; second, the researchers hypothesised that because they did not require students to 'friend' each other (thus creating a more explicit social connection than simply being in a group together) they had not properly exploited the key social affordance of Facebook. As a result, "many of the Facebook 'cues' that might have otherwise driven students back to the discussion, or made them feel more of a sense of social presence, were not available". Nevertheless, these researchers remain positive about Facebook and have used it more successfully on other occasions, noting that they have found learning engagement between students on Facebook has extended beyond semester times, whereas this outcome is not possible with a closed learning management system.

The results DeSchryver et al. produced are important now mainly to demonstrate why research in this area is always a matter of exploration without definitive conclusions. The research reported occurred in 2007 and, since that time, Facebook has changed very significantly. The research remains valuable, however, for what it says about the researchers as teachers. First, they concluded that Facebook may not be useful because it does not have threaded discussion forums but simply a chronological list; they happily assumed that "as Facebook evolves, threaded discussions will become more commonplace therein, and may help maximize its affordances for interaction". Second, the lesson they drew from the experience was that, in future, they would require students to 'friend' each other so as to better utilise mechanisms which come with friending. Both of these conclusions demonstrate that the research team approached the

investigation of Facebook and its role in education from a very traditional perspective, seeking to make Facebook fit into their pre-existing understandings of education. First, based on the existing use of Moodle, DeSchryver et al. normatively assumed threaded discussion was better: in fact Facebook has educated people *away* from threaded discussions and produced new online conversational conventions to which educators are adapting, including the designers of Moodle 2. Second, DeSchryver et al. reduced the complexity of decision making about 'friends' to a technological pre-condition for effective system use, thereby focusing too heavily on the technological rather than the social basis for the use of Facebook. DeSchryver et al. finally concluded that the *lack* of difference found in the research between the use of Facebook and Moodle was explicable as a consequence of the excellent curriculum design: "the absence of significant differences in our measures between the different delivery media may demonstrate the power of good pedagogy to override any media differences". In other words, they not only wished students to conform to their expectations of how to learn, but also interpreted their results as if students *had* conformed. It is likely the picture was rather more complicated than that.

Similar evidence of the struggles academics have to appreciate Facebook as a system independent of their intentions and expectations, when it comes to educational use, comes from Robyler et al. (2010). Looking at the differences in attitude towards Facebook between faculty and students at an American university, they found a "significant difference between the perceived role of this tool as social, rather than educational. Students seem much more open to the idea of using Facebook instructionally than do faculty" (Robyler et al., 2010, p. 138). They concluded that, while the future can be hard to predict because of rapid shifts in the popularity of technologies, at the moment the role of Facebook in education was limited by the reluctance of faculty members to adopt it. More generally, "SNSs may become yet another technology that had great potential for improving the higher education experience but failed to be adopted enough to have any real impact" (p. 138). Whether true or not, the notable feature of this research is its assumption that 'adoption' by faculty is the primary means by which Facebook could make education better. Perhaps the real lesson from the differences in perception is that students already use Facebook to support and extend their learning and will do so regardless of faculty involvement. Researchers and indeed educators who position academics as the arbiters of engagement with new technologies thereby perpetuate underlying notions of the authority of the teacher over the student.

Mazer et al. (2007) also considered the problem from the academics' perspective, arguing that carefully managed self-disclosure through a teacher's profile might assist in the formation of better student-teacher relationships in class (and, by extension, throughout the whole learning engagement) Such a use would remind students that teaching is a particular duty or role, only part of an individual's identity. The evidence from the limited study they reported is strong for the positive benefits of this effect, but of more interest is the way that Facebook is positioned here as something which teachers use *as teachers*, almost undermining the very notion that its benefit is to ensure teachers are not seen just in that manner. While based on experiments conducted early in the life of Facebook, nevertheless, we see another version of the same approach implicit in Robyler's research: that the correct pedagogical approach to Facebook is determined first by how it might be subsumed into the normal business of education with teachers determining its utility and utilising it in ways contrary to already established norms. For Robyler et al. and Mazer et al., the implication is clear: they seek the benefit of blurring the boundary between informal and formal learning but only in

ways that allow the contradictory demarcation of authority between teacher and student to be maintained.

So what exactly is the relationship between the use of Facebook for more formal learning and its general use? Some evidence can be gained from Estus (2010), who reported that students compulsorily using a Facebook closed group to discuss their studies and engage more with readings out of class were all positive about the experience. Interestingly, she found that students would not check the group as often as they would check their general Facebook activity, normally focusing on study weekly, while being a daily Facebook user. Thus students maintained a degree of separation between 'everyday' uses of Facebook and its use for formal learning (most likely because of the technical differentiation of the group from a normal newsfeed page). Estus reported her findings with a sensible recognition of the reasons why she had thought Facebook might be valuable:

> Educators in all settings strive to identify methods to engage and motivate students to learn. This is true especially within the current generation of students who embrace trends in technology because this always has been a part of their lives. Using Facebook is so widespread that its language is spoken by most college students…

Clearly, this use of online learning as a complement to the normal business of university education was a novel experience for both the teacher and the students. While she noted the use of a learning management system for uploading readings and formal communication (such as submitting assignments), it is remarkable to see how her students responded to the use of Facebook in a manner very similar to that evident in early online learning in the 1990s, just as learning management systems were starting to develop. Thus, we have evidence that the first question to ask, when considering the use of Facebook, is: what effects might *any* kind of online engagement have in our teaching and learning? Online learning is always going to require us to think of the pedagogic benefit of computer-mediated communication. The specific choice of Facebook, as exemplified in Estus' research, is more a response to how we might better connect with the way our students *themselves* understand computer-mediated communication, attempting to realise the advantages of such interaction in a setting that is 'natural' to students. As Estus concluded, "[c]ontributing to discussions and sharing additional ideas, *both orally and through Facebook*, became a natural process rather than an assigned course activity [emphasis added]."

This natural setting may not necessarily be an advantage, however. Although it affords teachers a chance to align learning-oriented communications with other forms in which students are regularly engaged, it also means that teachers must adapt to pre-existing conventions (often structurally enforced by the system's design) and therefore have less control over how they utilise such communications. Mazman and Usluel (2010, p. 452) found, for example, that Facebook adoption and use by students is largely governed by factors external to education and that its use for learning is indeed shaped by prior adoption and use. Estus (2010) summed up this dilemma by concluding "The increased time spent on Facebook may be a distraction from time intentionally allocated to schoolwork. Alternatively, Facebook may be considered a learning tool reaching out to students in a familiar way and encouraging them to be more involved in a particular course if this technology were used" (see also Madge et al. 2007 for students' own assessment that Facebook risked only a superficial or distracted engagement with study). Facebook might be said to be the most obvious example of how education now

involves a convergence of the opportunity to engage students and the threat of lowering the productive outcome of that engagement.

Facebook can satisfy academics' attention-seeking desires while normalising only casually attentive interaction in return. This duality is exemplified by Bosch (2009). Reflecting on how students enthusiastically use Facebook while largely ignoring the formal learning management systems, she implicitly reveals the pressure to respond to and be led by this student behaviour:

> However, if one considers the large numbers of students on Facebook often actively participating in discussions and groups, it cannot be ignored as a potential educational tool. Compared to university course sites, e.g. Vula at UCT [University of Cape Town], students are more engaged with Facebook, and perhaps educators need to explore ways to tap into an already popular network. After all, these methods of community building (online social networks) are the ways in which students today are meeting … Facebook may be just the tool we need to stimulate collaborative student-led learning (Bosch, 2009, p. 190).

Yet, as Bosch concludes, this move into the online environments that students have already made their own, and which encompass much more than just education, might not fulfil the challenge for higher education [which] remains to create a reading culture, and foster the development of skills related to critical reading and thinking (p. 197).

The problem is that academics cannot easily have it both ways, to both gain attention through Facebook and yet demand its reciprocation in a manner consistent with other norms. Skerritt, reviewing an example of the use of Facebook within teacher education via students' creation of a fake profile for communication and reflection, identified the risk that Facebook and similar systems might be "co-opted into the classroom only to the extent that they facilitated learning the kinds of literacies privileged by schools without seriously contesting schools' traditional cultures" (2010, p. 81). The same might also be said of universities' approaches, moderated only by the fact that generally students in higher education are afforded some degree of freedom beyond that of school children. Academic approaches to Facebook always run the risk of forms of appropriation in which the conduct of exchanges and interactions must be made proper if they are to serve educational purposes, trivialising the rest of what happens on Facebook. While Facebook is indeed often trivial, the existence of this desire for normalisation is what matters: it marks out a dynamic that always comes into play when educators seek, in the Internet, something which connects with students, which makes for flexibility, or which produces innovation in pedagogy – these quests attempt to re-make the Internet (if only for a time) into something it is not.

Conclusion

Selwyn has offered one of the more sophisticated approaches to understanding the likely benefits that Facebook might provide, noting the learning opportunities afforded by the "conversational, collaborative and communal qualities of social networking services"; that Facebook provides "support for interaction between learners facing the common dilemma of negotiating their studies; and that social networking can become learning networking, as individual students attach themselves to other students, and teachers, and gain insights outside of more traditional instructional settings" (2009, p. 158). His research focused on the public posts by students on their 'walls' (pronouncements not connected to other comments or posts), quite different to the specific use of groups for classes or courses which are normally what researchers study.

He showed how Facebook postings variously: performed the student's identity (as a student); provided or sought support (both emotional and practical) in managing studies; and generally commented on life at a large university which they were attending in person.

Of most significance is Selwyn's reflection that:

> The data presented in this paper represent the sporadic and often uncomfortable intrusion of university education into students' private, personal and interpersonal worlds. Indeed, the data show the fluctuating prominence of educational concerns within students' overall use of *Facebook*, with instances of education-related interactions between students structured by the rhythms of assessment schedules or timetabled teaching provision rather than a desire for forms of continuous learning or *ad hoc* educational exchange (p. 170).

Selwyn thus concluded that, while Facebook is clearly essential for students and certainly a "learning technology", it "contributes to what Kitto and Higgins (2003, p. 49) termed, 'the production of the university as an ambivalent space'" (p. 171). This ambivalence is marked, according to the originators of the idea, by uncertainty about whether online-based learning activities increase or decrease the flexibility and freedom students gain online and whether the campus does or does not remain an organising 'locus' for their studies. Kitto and Higgins had concluded that students may not find online learning any more 'flexible' than other educational arrangements because "appropriate space, technology, and capital must be obtained to study effectively. Judgements must be made on the basis of how much time they can afford to be online and when they can get online." (2003, p. 51).

With the more widespread availability of connectivity (especially through mobile devices) than a decade ago when Kitto and Higgins were writing, we might turn around this insight and reflect on the extent to which the university is, because of the Internet, an ambivalent space for *academics*. Teachers' relations with students, and the judgments about time and effort to be expended, are much more uncertain now because students accept, tolerate or even embrace this ambivalence about the university and, in doing so, can thereby force upon their teachers similar acts of negotiation which place in question the boundaries between formalised times and places of instruction and the ambiguous multi-purpose, temporally fluid zones of social networking.

Higher educators' desire to exploit Facebook's crucial role in the way students manage their lives through social and organisational communication and information sharing, while also being sensitive to the separation which students wish to maintain between the generality of their everyday lives and those specific aspects of being a student. In this duality certain processes of effective learning fit naturally with Facebook simply because it is so popular, but the formal educational relationship between a student and their teachers and administrators does not fit so well, even as this relationship nevertheless is enacted through informal uses. As the various examples I have reviewed in this paper demonstrate, *any* use of Facebook will necessarily confront both teachers and students with the fact that, in an online environment which is so closely entwined with real identities, real places and persistent communication, they are always explicitly negotiating the boundaries between formal and informal. In other words, Facebook does not allow us to separate formal and informal uses in education. Its design and social affordances are all about confusion and overlap, while its computer mediated format also trumps the traditional use of time and place as a means of enforcing the separations between people based on role and function.

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