

## **Blogging at university as a case study in instructional design: Challenges and suggestions towards professional development**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Although the potentials of ICT such as blogs seem to be obvious, universities find challenges in using them pedagogically. For example, there is dissonance between blogging and pedagogy, or rather a gap between rhetoric about blog potential and blog practice, which has prompted this investigation and professional development in the use of blogs at the University of New England (UNE). Preliminary findings show fundamental implications for professional development in pedagogical uses of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

**Keywords:** *Blogging, Instructional Design (ID), University Education, Information and Communications Technology (ICT)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The University of New England (UNE) is located at Armidale in rural New South Wales, Australia. Due to its location, a large proportion of student population at the university are distance learners. As a consequence, ICT plays an indispensable role in the delivery of learning and instruction at the university. At UNE, students are expected to be active participants in constructing knowledge. In supporting students, lecturers are encouraged to use ICT to create constructivist environments built upon constructivist learning principles through the use of tools such as forums, chat rooms, wikis and blogs, many of which form part of the Learning Management Systems such as Sakai and Blackboard. Therefore, staff at the university must be professionally developed in ICT skills, and in the pedagogical use of ICT to ensure that the affordances offered by these tools can be realised. Furthermore, professional development must be continuous because ICT is ever changing. In response, a number of projects have been implemented at UNE with the aim of: identifying the challenges debilitating staff and students against pedagogical ICT use, formulating frameworks for staff professional development and enhancing student active learning through the use of ICT.

The overall focus of this paper is the use of Instructional Design (ID) in blogs. The conceptualisation of ID used in this paper is as described by Dick, Carey & Carey (2005), and Gagné, Briggs and Wager (1992). These models show ID as being comprised of three distinct phases. Firstly, the analysis of needs, including roles, context and pedagogy; secondly, the development of strategy in terms of organization and delivery, and; thirdly, an evaluation phase that is both formative and summative. The paper also considers Siragusa, Dixon & Dixon's (2007) ID model for higher education, which *inter alia* includes the analysis of pedagogical philosophy, content, delivery mode, lecturer's roles and ICT capacity, and online support, strategy of delivery, as well as evaluation.

The adoption of ICT without focussed pedagogical goals realised in most institutions (Mandinach, 2005: 2) is also one of the major challenges facing university education. Moreover, the rapid evolution of ICT leads to the adoption of technologies without enough time to seriously research their impact upon learning and teaching. To meet this challenge, Sims (2006: 2) suggests

designing pedagogical strategies for each ICT because different ICT tools might support different pedagogical strategies. Failure to do so could have consequences as 'online learning solutions, which are developed without proper regard to appropriate pedagogies and the needs of students, are destined to failure' (Bell, Bush, Nicholson, O'Brien, & Tran, 2002: 2). To further complicate matters, digital natives (i.e., students born after 1980) are inclined to use learning strategies that differ from traditional paradigms (Sims, *ibid.*). Consequently, traditional pedagogies used at universities, such as UNE, might not be applicable, and will have to be transformed to suit the digital natives. These kinds of challenges formed the basis for this research project aiming at ultimately formulating a framework for the professional development of university staff in the pedagogical use of ICT.

### Research questions

The first phase of this project focussed on answering the following research questions:

1. What are blogs used for at UNE and other Australian universities?
2. How long do the blogs last at UNE?

'Use' is open and difficult to evaluate, since it is multivariate and includes access and interactivity, which are complicated terms. Notwithstanding, in this study, 'use' included all interactions staff and students made through blogs.

## LITERATURE

### General ICT use

Studies in ICT in education are plentiful and often include models of evaluating ICT (e.g., Mandinach, 2005). Concerns include the complexity of the 'interaction between disciplinary content, learning outcomes and online, computer-based learning environments' (Sims, Dobbs & Hand, 2002: 137). This interaction is also illustrated in Muwanga-Zake (2007: 31), indicating an intercourse between curriculum, ICT and subject matter components. The curriculum dimension considers student learning styles, needs and preferences; provision of quality learning as perceived by stakeholders in an institution; enabling interactivity between participants in a course; and opportunities for assessment and feedback. ICT specifically has potential towards student-centred learning and research (Sims, 2006; Richardson, 2004). However, successful practical pedagogical applications beyond the communication of information are scarce, particularly in specific educational contexts. One reason for this scarcity is that the ICT industry rarely designs tools for specific pedagogical applications. There is a dearth of critical analyses of praxis beyond rhetorical ICT potentials. However, there is a need for research in ICT-supported pedagogy to keep pace with developments in ICT.

A need for continuous research for the most appropriate pedagogy for each ICT tool exacerbates the misuse of ICT in education, and leads to *inter alia*:

- New or no rules or procedures / processes;
- Ad hoc, trial and error;
- Students becoming co-designers;
- Continuous revision of ICT in education policies; and
- ICT competing for more time, diminishing time for reflective assimilation of ICT in education

Critically, universities often expect lecturers to use ICT in education without allocating enough time for continuous professional development. Thus, ICT are acquired and implemented without the adequate training of staff (Sims *et al.*, 2007: 136).

The project reported by this paper was motivated by the premise that blogs at UNE were being

adopted at UNE without a clearly pre-determined pedagogical framework or any appropriate level of professional development of staff.

## Blog

A blog is a website where entries are written and displayed in a reverse chronological order (Scott, 2001). Blogs were introduced in the mid 1990s (Farmer, Yue, & Brooks, 2006: 263) and are easy to use because the user does not need sophisticated technical knowledge to create or maintain them (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003: 2).

Blogs are primarily personal journal and opinion entries, which enhance a feeling of social interaction. Through a blog, a person gets a feeling of belonging in a wide range of professional activities such as psychological therapy, law, journalism, and research (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003: 2; Derkeley, 2008). To provide a justification for the pedagogical use of blogs, Papacharissi (cited in Farmer, *et al.*, 2007: 263) considered blogs to be 'transformational communicative technologies', which, according to Framer *et al.*, (2007: 263), 'allow users to connect and become part of an active social corpus, while exercising and legitimating their personal expressive spaces'. Blog users inherently expect social transactions, communication, personal assertion and empowerment through blogs.

There are examples of blogs in a range of professions listed at various sites such as 'Blogs in Education' (<http://awd.cl.uh.edu/blog/>) and the role of blogs is recognised by the Australian Department of Education and Training (2007), which states that:

*'Weblogs provide a communication space that teachers can utilise with students whenever there is a curriculum need to develop writing, share ideas, and reflect on work being undertaken in the classroom'.*

The high activity in the educational use of blogs is exemplified at 'Edublog' (<http://edublogs.org/>), and this use is increasing. For example, in September 2008 Edublog was hosting 217,513 blogs, but this number had increased to 291,740 blogs on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2009 (Approximately 10,000 blogs per month or 300 blogs a day).

University web sites and many leading ICT pedagogy experts, such as Ferdig & Trammel (2004), Armstrong, Berry & Lamshed (2007), Downes (2004), Richardson (2004), Kennedy (2003), Glenn (2003), O'Donnell (2005), and Bartlett-Bragg (2003) claim a myriad of pedagogical blog potentials such as:

- Exchanging insights and information, which publishers are too critical to print;
- Collaboration between diverse communities. Blogs can encourage integration of personal, peer, and expert narratives;
- Hosting e-portfolios, archives and student publications;
- Reflective or journal writings as an alternative to "traditional" forums or bulletin boards;
- Group work, which could be synchronous or asynchronous within or between groups;
- Learning portals;
- Assignment submission and review; and
- Sharing course-related resources

These blog potentials could enrich learning experiences and lead to deeper learning.

Rosie cited in Bartlett-Bragg (2003: 2-3) elaborated that deep learning involves constructing connections between concepts in a context. Rosie added that deep learning is unlike surface learning where students 'complete the minimum content necessary to meet assessment requirements'. Furthermore, 'blogs offer a socially situated, student centred, contemporary, technical solution' (O'Donnell, 2005), and catering for individual self-expression and socially driven learning (Farmer, *et al.*, 2007: 262). Student-centred learning is enabled in blog

monologues that enhance constructivist cognition and metacognition (higher order thinking). Walker (reported in Bartlett-Bragg, 2003: 9) believed that the 'creative interaction with one's own development' ensured the incorporation and integration of knowledge into schema. In, Farmer, *et al.* (2007: 263) there are records of metacognitive reflections, which led students to develop new strategies for continuous learning. Framer *et al.* explain that:

*'... the interactive, hypertextual capacity of blogging was ideal for enabling associative thinking as students linked concepts taught in the subject with current issues and events in the wider social context as represented through the web'.*

Moreover, students are conscious of their unrestricted postings to the public and are more careful about the way 'they say things, how they collect their thoughts and summarise their understanding' (Armstrong, *et. al.*, 2007). Consciousness to the public relate with dialogues characteristic of Vygotsky's social constructivism. Ferdig & Trammell (2004) highlights blog roles in social interaction and pedagogy, stating that:

*'... knowledge construction is discursive, relational and conversational in nature. Therefore, as students appropriate and transform knowledge, they must have authentic opportunities for publication of knowledge'.*

O'Donnell (2005), drawing on Papert's constructionism, explains that students converse about the transformation of their ideas for public participation – the ideas become artefacts, chronologically ordered by the blog, which are ecological environments of minds and constructs. O'Donnell quotes Lowe, who believed that a constructionist blog is able to cater for personal knowledge management within a social context. Thus, blogs could provide an opportunity for engagement and scaffolding within and outside classrooms. An example is a blog community about a book, which involved students and their parents (Richardson, 2004). Another example is a blog journal project, which encouraged tutor-student engagement in dialogue and so increased students' participation by offering an additional mode of response and feedback, while monitoring and guiding individual students' learning (McGuinn & Hogarth, 2000). Hence, teachers use blogs in place of standard class web pages to enhance deep learning (Downes, 2004).

At universities, blogs have become part of managing courses and learning especially through Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as the Blackboard and Sakai, and university students seem to be adopting these and other blogs. For example, in a sample of 26-year old (or less) students (i.e., digital citizens) at Melbourne University, Kennedy, *et al.* (2006: 3) found that 34.9% had kept their own blog, 58.6% were reading other people's blogs, while 43.9% were making commenting on other blogs.

Successful pedagogical uses of blogs have been abundantly reported (e.g., Richardson, 2004; Bartlett-Bragg, 2003). Pedagogically successful and valuable blogs involve careful planning and considerations (Bartlett-Bragg, 2003: 6). Ways of creating successful pedagogical blogs include making blogs mandatory and cultivating educationally sound perceptions of blogs among students (Cheung, Li, Lui, & Choy, 2006). Additionally, O'Donnell, (2005) advises for blog-use across 'classes over the duration of a degree course', instead of focussing on a 'specific assignment or a single semester'. These approaches allow students to grow into blog communities where they co-construct and define the course and learning strategies.

The University of Sydney (at <http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/support/getblog.shtml>) advises that:

*'...the most successful blogs are those which consistently address a well-defined topic. A good blog will reflect that topic in its title, descriptions and (obviously) the content of its posts'.*

That is, the pedagogical objectives of a blog should be clarified to students before they start to blog. As an example, Farmer, *et al.* (2007: 264) instructed students at the inception of a blog to 'reflect upon and discuss course content that arose out of their learning experiences'. Thereafter,

students should be scaffolded on creating good posts and feedbacks right from the blog creation (Huann, John, Yuen, 2005).

To achieve blog growth, Bartlett-Bragg (2003) recommends five stages of students' guidance including: establishment; introspection; reflective monologues; reflective dialogue; and knowledge artefact. Bartlett-Bragg (2003) emphasises a need to pose structured questions as guides, especially focussed on students' experiences or recollections, adding that these motivate students. In fact, Farmer, *et al.* (2007: 263) integrated blogs into formative assessment exercises. Similarly, Armstrong *et al.* (2007) advise that the invitation for responses should be structured for serious thoughts. Passive invitations such as 'Comment' should be minimised in favour of reflective terms such as 'Discuss' or 'What do you think?' Thus, students' opinions, 'critical thinking and deep reflective qualities of learning' should have surfaced by the 'knowledge artefact' stage, which is recommended in Bartlett-Bragg (2003: 8). Thus, O'Donnell (2005: 1) conceives activities in blogs as a part of new ways of thinking that is happening through cyber cultural phenomena.

While blogs could encourage the freedom of expression as an important element of reflection, such a freedom could also be perceived as a potential weakness. Part of the weakness emanates from unrealistic expectations, exacerbated by the failure to provide clearly defined blog objectives and lack of developmental work with students. There is concern that the freedom accorded to students and staff to blog could lead to the misuse of blogs (Cheung, *et al.*, 2006), for example, for indecent discussions. There is also concern, as evidenced by Gartner's Hype Cycle (Drobik, 2009) of a possible loss of enthusiasm for blogs once their use is seen as being ordinary. Ordinary use of blogs includes a focus on personal celebrations of individual egos (O'Donnell, 2005). Thus, Glenn (2003) argues that blogs lack rigorous scholarly work. Moreover, dissatisfaction with privacy and security might lead to a loss of interest to the extent that few blogs survive beyond a year (12 months) (Richardson, 2004; Downes, 2004). Hence, O'Donnell (2005) reports a complaint that blogs end up being "forced writing"; as lecturers try to make blogs pedagogically useful. Consequently, there is 'a gap between blog rhetoric and blog practice' (O'Donnell, 2005).

Furthermore, as with other ICT, O'Donnell (2005) identifies a possible conflict of interest between a lecturer's desire to improve pedagogy, and administrative interests to save money through the use of blogs. Often an institution's perception of blogs as 'an advancement over previous online learning environments' (Farmer, *et al.*, 2007: 263) comes at the expense of the quality of pedagogical improvement blogs could make. Additionally important are technical design considerations, which include the blog capacity to upload photographs, drawings and documents, as well as students' immediate access to blogs the moment they have thoughts to post (Armstrong *et al.*, 2007; Richardson, 2004; Downes, 2004).

In consideration of the above, O'Donnell's (2005: 1) question about the location of blogs in pedagogical practices and Sims' (2006) suggestion of rethinking and remodelling pedagogy around blogs and other ICT, should be seriously researched.

## **THE STUDY**

### **Sample size**

The blogs at UNE were studied between March 2007 and March 2008. The survey of blogs use stopped in March 2008 because the workshops for professional development (PD) of staff started from April 2008. Nine other Australian universities were surveyed between February and March

2008.

### **Methodology**

The methodology considered Bartlett-Bragg's (2003) guidance for investigating pedagogical roles of ICT in context, such as subject area and uses. However, since ICT is generally experimental and often lacks clear pedagogical objectives, research methodologies for ICT in pedagogy are complex (Mandinach, 2005; Cronbach, 1982). For example, defining control study groups or variables is difficult (Mandinach, 2005: 1814 - 1815). Additionally, an open-ended form of inquiry is necessary where there are unexpected problems and issues (Cronbach, 1982). As a result, this study adopted a survey, framed in continuous interaction with stakeholders at UNE in an iterative manner (Mandinach, 2005: 1820).

At UNE, all blogs were accessed from the university's blog portal, and then every blog was examined. The blogs at UNE were then few and could be all studied easily.

In total, nine other Australian universities were sampled by typing the term 'blog' in the search link at each institution's website. Two of these institutions, the Australian National University and the University of Sydney, were specifically selected because they apparently had busy and pedagogically useful blogs. The other seven institutions (whose names are withheld for ethical reasons) were randomly selected from a website listing Australian universities (<http://www.australian-universities.com/list/>). Blogs index postings in chronological order, with the most recent posting at the top of the blog page. Therefore, in the nine universities, active blogs in the past 12 months (i.e., up to March 2007) were easy to find. These were opened and browsed to determine their content.

In all universities, the blogs were classified according to the proprietor as follows: personal – blogs by individual staff or students; administrative – blogs by UNE administration; faculty and school – blogs by faculty and schools, and; society or group – blogs by societies or groups of people. The information in each blog was analysed and categorised by its focus. Information focal categories included personal interests or students. Information could also be about general affairs. Information, which was not clearly directed to anybody, was placed in a 'not clear' category. There was particular search for entries about learning and teaching.

To determine the blog longevity the date of inception of each blog was determined by examining the date of the first post in the blog's archives. The survival of the blog was considered to be the period between inception and the most recent post in that blog. Where possible, blog administrators where academic discourses were happening were consulted to further determine the purposes of their blogs.

This study was mainly delimited by the nature of blogs. For example, blog content can change daily. Furthermore, some blogs in some universities and those in Learning Management Systems could not be accessed without passwords. Other limiting factors included that:

- The reasons for staff blogs were still to be investigated;
- It was not easy to identify staff and students who had more than one blog; and
- Some blogs could have been deleted during the course of the study without a chance to access them.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

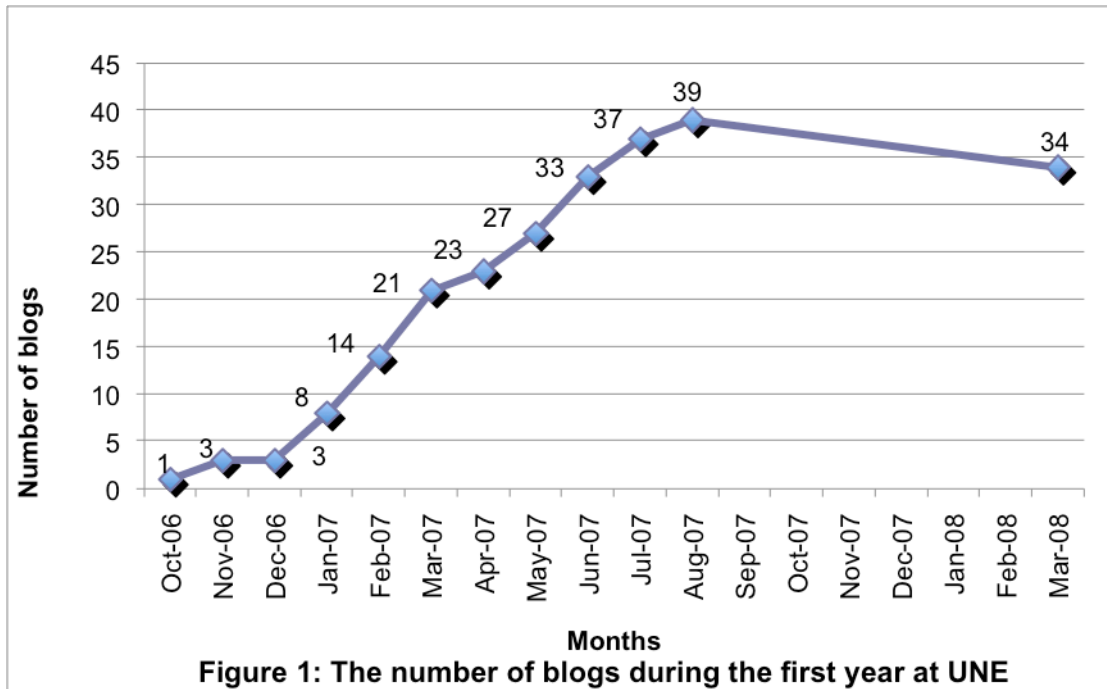
### **Blogs at the University of New England (UNE)**

UNE blogs show particular patterns. For example:

- Students did not post academic discussions

- Blogs by the ICT support group, all included in the ‘administrative’ category, were meant to encourage people to blog and were active for relatively longer periods. These included EDIT; GIS; Longlive Education; UNE blogs; and Rainsey.
- One person had two blogs. There could have been more people with one or more blogs using different names.

Figure 1 shows that there was a net increase in the number of blogs from the beginning of blogs at UNE in October 2006 until July 2007. That is, there were more blogs created than deleted until sometime after August 2007, since some blogs had been deleted before March 2008 (Table2).



There were 34 blogs in March 2008. Thus, more blogs were deleted than created sometime after August 2007. Unfortunately, the peak number of blogs between August 2007 and March 2008 was not determined. Nonetheless, it was established that 21 blogs had been deleted altogether between January 2007 and March 2008. That is, the number of blogs created up to March 2008 was 55, of which 21 ( $21/55 = 38\%$ ) were deleted (Table 1), leaving 34 blogs active in March 2008 (Table 2). Only eight new blogs were created between January and March 2008.

Sixteen (16) blogs of the 21 blogs (i.e., 76%) that were deleted belonged to the ‘personal’ category (Column II, Table 1). None of the Faculty/School blogs had yet been discontinued.

**Table 1:** Deleted (Were recorded in March 2007 but not appearing in March 2008)

Category	Overall number deleted	Information for				Started			Survival (inception to last post) - Months				
		Personal	Student Information	General	Not clear	2006	2007	2008	Less than 2	2-4	5-7	8-12	Greater than 12
Personal	16 (76%)	16	-	-	-	1	15	-	14	-	1		1
Administration													
Faculty / School													
Educ. Arts													
Society / group	5			4	1		5		3	2			
<b>Total</b>	21	16		4	1	1	20		17 (81%)	2	1		1

Furthermore, 17 of the blogs that were deleted did not survive beyond 2 months. Table 2 shows a majority of blogs belonging to the personal category (59%). The Administration, with 24% of blogs, is second in the number of blogs.

**Table 2:** Summary of blogs at UNE on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2008 (Number of blogs = 34)  
Key: Numbers represent percentages

	%	Information for				Started			Survival (inception to last post) - Months				
		About an individual	Student	General	Not clear	2006	2007	2008	Less than 2	2-4	5-7	8-12	Greater than 12
Personal	59	44		12	3	3	44	12	21		3	9	26
Administration	24	-	6	18	-	6	12	6	3	6	3	3	9
Faculty / School													
Educ.	6	-	3	3			3	3	3				3
Arts	3			3				3		3			
Society / group	9			9			9				3	3	3
<b>Total</b>		44	9	44	3	9	68	24	26	9	9	16	41

In Table 2, the Faculties and Schools were not effectively participating in blogs. The highest proportion of blogs was personal (44%), all of which were about individual interests of the proprietors. None of the blogs were directed to pedagogy, and no personal blog had information specifically directed to students.



44% of blogs were about 'General Information' (information not directed to any particular audience). Only 9% of blogs were about information for students. The table also shows that most of the blogs were opened during 2007 (68%), although blogs started during late 2006 at UNE. It should be noted that, participation in blogs at UNE competed for staff attention against wikis, and the introduction of Sakai and Blackboard, both of which were mandatory Learning Management Systems (LMS) for staff to use. While there was clear and firm guidance to staff to use the LMS, there were no rules, training and requirements to start blogs.

### **Blogs at other Australian universities**

The remainder of data on blogs in other universities was checked during March of 2008. The focus of this paper is the pedagogy in blogs, as well as upon student participation in blogs at the specific sample of universities. There was an interesting blog at the Australian National University (ANU) (<http://cnma.anu.edu.au/blogs/>). This blog had a group of 12 students and a convenor in the Faculty of Arts. The convenor of the blog stated that,

*The main reason for the blog was to provide an e-journal space for students to write about their ideas and comment on the class sessions. In class we discussed various approaches to writing and identity and used the blog as a more informal space. (Gates-Stuart, e-mail communication, February 2008).*

Each student had a page in the blog and wrote reflections about every topic with which the class was dealing with. The convenor of the blog was also the lecturer of the unit of study and intermittently provided guidance and comments to each student in the blog.

The following quotations attest to the reflective nature of the postings on this blog:

*Following on from my thinking in the last post, just a few last words on visual effects and their changing role in the documentary. Visual effects are typically used in documentary,*

*...*

*One of the most interesting things to come out of the second research forum (for me) was ...*

*( <http://cnma.anu.edu.au/blogs/adeline/> )*

The same student has a project proposal at <http://cnma.anu.edu.au/blogs/andrej/?cat=183>

Examples of students' reflections are posted at <http://cnma.anu.edu.au/blogs/owenL/?cat=195> and at <http://cnma.anu.edu.au/blogs/tao/>.

Serious blogs also appeared at the University of Sydney, but the university excluded student personal blogs by a policy requiring potential blog users to apply for blog space. The blog policy (which can be found at <http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/support/getblog.shtml>), states that blogs are intended for supporting staff in their research, academic work and collaboration. It further advises 'students looking for a personal blog space to look for other blog providers like Blogger.com'.

Tables 3 and 4 show samples of blogs at the two universities above. The two have been coded A and B to make data anonymous.

**Table 3: University A. Number of blogs sampled = 12**

Key: Numbers represent percentages

Category	%	Stu. Partic.	Information for				Started			Survival (inception to last post) - Months					
			Personal	Student	General	Not clear	2006	2007	2008	Less than 2	2-4	5-7	8-12	12 - 16	Over 20
Personal	50		8		33	8	50			8	8			8	25
Administration															
Faculty / School															
Educ															
Arts	8	8		8			8								8
Society / group	40	8		8	33		24		16		8	8		8	16
<b>Total</b>		16	8	16	67	8	82		16	8	16	8		16	50

Students participated in 16% of the blogs in University A (Table 3), and 22% in University B (Table 4). Similar trends regarding low proportions of blogs providing information for students appear: UNE at 9%, university A at 16%, and University B at 33%. Conversely, UNE had the highest personal blogs (59%), compared to 50% for University A. University B had a much lower proportion of personal blogs (11%) and a much higher proportion of blogs by Information Systems (33%).

**Table 4: University B. Number of blogs sampled = 9**

Key: Numbers represent percentages

Category	%	Stu. Partic.	Information for-				Started			Survival (inception to last post) - Months					
			Personal	Student	General	Not clear	2006	2007	2008	Less than 2	2-4	5-7	8-12	12 - 16	Over 20
Personal	11		11				11							11	11
Administration	22	22		22			11	11		11					
Faculty / School															
Educ	10						11								11
Arts															
Inf. Syst.	33			11	11		22	11				11	11		11
Cultural studies	11				11				11	11					
Society / group	11				11				11	11					
<b>Total</b>		22	11	33	33		55	33	11	33		11	22		33

Notes: A blog focussed on first year students at University B.

The other seven universities wrote about blogs but had no blogs.

## DISCUSSION

Despite the potential and examples of success of blogs in literature, of the 10 Australian universities sampled, the majority (seven) did not blog. In the three universities, blogs ranged from *laissez-faire* use where anyone could write anything legal, to serious academic discourses.

At UNE, blogs were yet to demonstrate the pedagogical potential cited in literature (see Ferdig & Trammel, 2004; Armstrong, Berry & Lamshed, 2007 and Downes, 2004). Except for one unit of study, there was no evidence of lecturers at UNE inviting students for a serious academic discourse in blogs. Only two blogs shared course-related resources through blogs. A low rate of lecturers' use of blogs and the non-pedagogical blogs could discourage serious students from using blogs (Shimabukuro, 2005).

Many of UNE blogs were personal without pedagogical value and did not last beyond 12 months. This finding is related to Downes' (2004) concerns about blogs containing trivia, in this case, in relation to pedagogy. The finding also confirms Glenn's (2003) claims of blogs being deficient of rigorous scholarly work and O'Donnell's (2005) report of a gap between blog rhetoric and blog practice. *Laissez-faire* blogs are unlikely to remain, since at the time (2009) of publishing this paper UNE blogs numbers had increased to almost 100 and some pedagogical blogs had been established. This blog trend at UNE seems to be in line with with Gartner's Hype Cycle (Drobik, 2009) but the likely causes are beyond this paper.

At UNE, the open policy on blogs seems to have encouraged higher incidences of personal blogs, albeit on individual interests, as well as of many blogs that were discontinued. Although such an open policy encourages individuals to try and learn about blogs, it appears to be sometimes abused; for example, when someone opens a blog and posts a single entry. Examples of some blogs at the University of Sydney and at the Australian National University support the view that successful pedagogical blogs require clearly guided objectives (Huann, John, Yuen, 2005; Farmer, *et al.*, 2007: 264; Armstrong *et. al.*, 2007; Bartlett-Bragg, 2003: 8). For example, the University of Sydney required blog users to abide by some rules and to register after stating reasons why they wanted to blog. The measures and the guidance about using blogs at the two universities account for the fewer blogs about personal affairs and the higher number of blogs on serious academic discourses and reflections.

O'Donnell's (2005: 1) and Sims (2006) argument for shifting pedagogical framework to suit a 'cybercultural practice' might be plausible but requires a major paradigm shift, which can be challenging to many potential blog and ICT users. Current findings from this study suggest that the shift requires staff to co-research ICT pedagogical uses.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD) IN ICT PEDAGOGICAL USE

The increased number of online courses at UNE has lead to the increased expectation that lecturers use blogs in their teaching. However, there are challenges concerning workloads and the provision of support and time allocation for professional development. Furthermore, as adult learners, it is likely that staff themselves will be the ones who will make the choices about when and what they want to learn about blogs. In the light of this, the provision of an open blog policy makes sense as it provides staff with the opportunity to experiment with blogs.

Although the *laissez-faire* blog could be manifestations of freedom of expression, academia has yet to extend blog use to pedagogical discourse. To do so, entails professional development that includes blog technical skills, and planning for blogs that involve students in social constructivist

and active learning blog environments. Therefore, further professional development is planned at UNE. This will be in accordance with Bartlett-Bragg's (2003) model on planning and designing pedagogical blogs, and will also draw from Framer *et al.* (2007).

As a first step, a blog on blogs, named Blogging @UNE (<http://blog.une.edu.au/blogs/>) has been developed to provide guidance and links to exemplars of pedagogically successful blogs. Blog seminars and workshops have also been organised. Staff have been encouraged and supported to start pedagogical blogs. Additionally, questionnaires have been applied to staff and students to understand the challenges and needs to create pedagogical blogs.

It has been realised that professional development activities such as those described above require designated time as matter of policy. However, UNE needs to identify and employ ICT specialists to support staff on a daily basis. Furthermore it has been recommended that ICT in Education lecturers be designated time to highlight the pedagogically useful features of blogs and ICT in general. Other imperatives include; managing change among staff to re-examine their teaching strategies with a view of incorporating ICT in a manner that supports constructivist and active learning; and shifting towards virtual and open spaces in which the distinction between lecturer and students is obscure.

As UNE tends towards more online and off-campus distance education, UNE is planning to improve its ICT capacity. For example, more LMS platforms are being tested and blog capacity can on request be extended to upload larger files. The short ICT life spans have to be considered too. For example, the cost-effectiveness of staff to perfect the use of a selected few ICT tools, such as blogs, than to adopt every new ICT on the market is being investigated.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE**

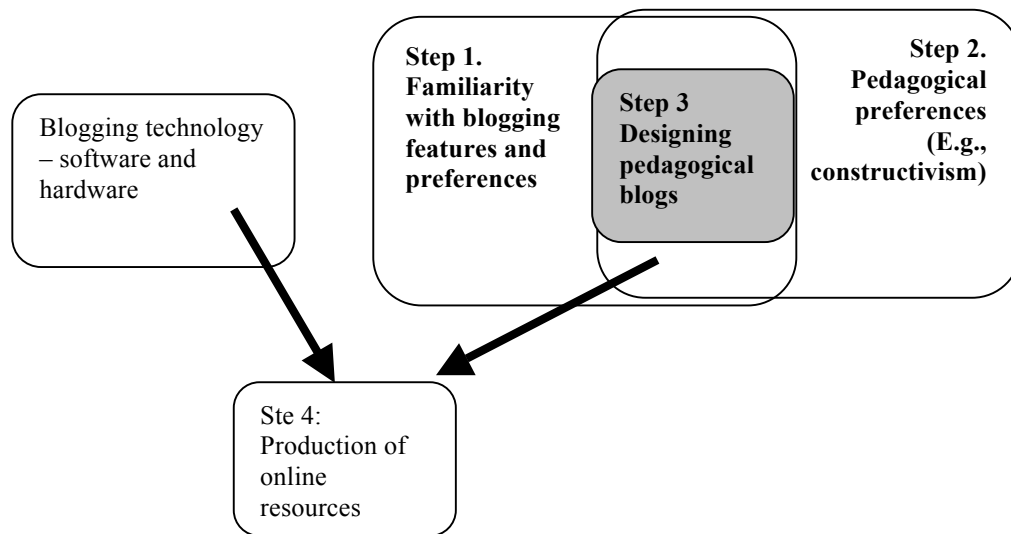
### **Setting up blogs**

The data suggests that pedagogical blogs require rules at the outset. Secondly, the pedagogy behind using a blog should be considered. For example, a constructivist blog that actively involves students requires planning the exact times when scaffolding would be offered to students. Appendix I suggest some of the planning that might be taken: it represents a graphical map illustrating challenges, and activities of role players, for a blog on biological environments. This graphic organiser shows that constructivist activities might occur between students and lectures as students start to post their findings. Each group in Appendix I would open a page in a blog where it would post and discuss the group's findings and thoughts. The students would be informed from the outset that their posts will be assessed and finally be accessible to the public.

### **Action research**

One suggestion is to involve students and staff in developing technical and pedagogical skills for creating blogs. Figure 2 illustrates some of the suggestions towards framework for professional development in blog pedagogical use.

The staff is presumably well grounded in their preferred pedagogical frameworks (Step 2). The framework requires staff to become familiar with the features of a selected ICT (Step 1), initially through *laissez-faire* use. The first (*laissez-faire*) step was probably necessary, and will be essential, at UNE for every staff who decides to start using blogs. Then the staff would be supported to seriously design pedagogical blogs (Step 3). This research project is now in this phase for some staff at UNE. The production phase, which is Step 4, might involve ICT specialists and administrative staff.



**Figure 2:** ICT development plan for staff

## CONCLUSION

The currently described project is part of a larger research designed to gain a better understanding of how blogs might be used more effectively in university contexts. Further research is necessary and is being conducted in the area of pedagogical use of blogs. The findings reported in this paper have proved to be helpful in structuring the second phase of this research about the adoption of ICT in university education, and the attendant need for professional development in the pedagogical use of ICT tools such as blogs.

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Appendix I: Modelling for a pedagogical blog, e.g., a lesson on environments



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