

## **The potential for blogging and micro-blogging in teaching: Personal reflections on practice**

Professor Andy Gale  
Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering  
Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences  
The University of Manchester

This article is about my perceived need to critically develop teaching practice in relation to blogging and tweeting. It is derived from an assignment I wrote for the new UoM PGCHE course. The conclusions constitute practical suggestions for future **habits**.

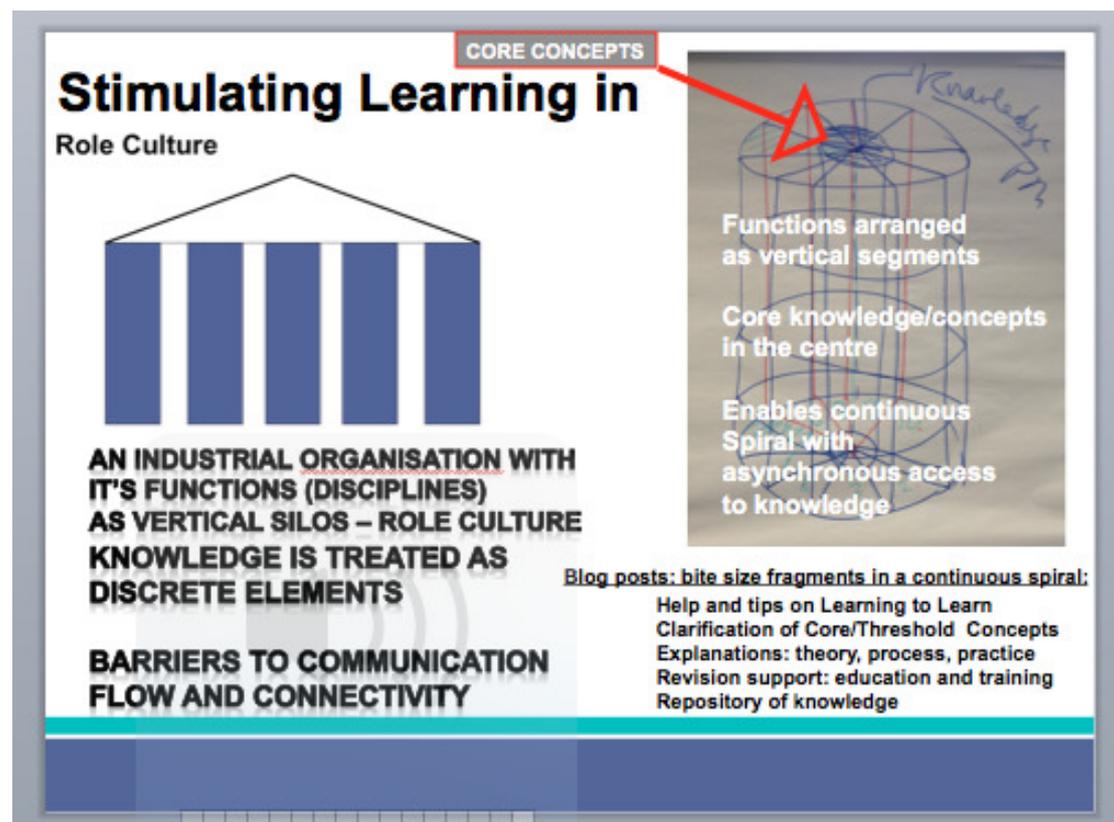
Four trends appear to be driving the use of new technologies in higher education (Horizon Report, 2010): high levels of online resources; an increased emphasis on meeting the expectations of students and informal personalised learning; an increase in the application of cloud computing and students' academic work being increasingly more collaborative. Continuous developments in Web 2.0 practices within higher education are leading to a more scholarly and reflective approach to university teaching and support in terms of training, e-learning coaching and course design (Horizon Report, 2010; OECD, 2008).

Ramsden (2009) discusses the application of micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter; shorter than blogging, less reflective and somewhat detached). He argues that the two styles of blogging may be used together in education, particularly within portfolio based learning, where an e-portfolio: "*a purposeful aggregation of digital items - ideas, evidence, reflections, feedback, etc; which 'presents' a selected audience with evidence of a persons learning and or ability*". He introduces two applications of micro-blogging: dissemination of readings and the facilitation of discussion, between students and lecturer, in and outside of the classroom.

I started micro-blogging four years ago, triggered by a new young colleague using Twitter in and outside of the classroom. I found that Twitter began to serve as a major source of news and enabled me to "push" articles and relevant public domain digital items to students, which they liked. I concluded that it was worth keeping up the **habit** of tweeting. Eventually, I embedded my tweeting habit in Blackboard, collaborating with colleagues to stream Twitter in the VLE on individual course units and whole courses via hashtags. Another young blogger colleague, with whom I had experimented and published on social media in teaching and learning (Saunders and Gale, 2012) said that she started blogging after having a paper rejected; determined to publish regardless and so I started too,

seeking support from a Faculty e-learning specialist. She began regular coaching sessions with me to build my blog site. In hindsight I would have worked on the pedagogic advantages of blogging before starting.

Intuitively, I realized that I needed to be clear about how blog posts can be used within a pedagogic framework, realizing that blog posts can be classified by type. In a recent workshop I had a profound reflective experience when discussing the role culture structure of an industrial organization. During discussions on how to design an education and training framework, it dawned on me that by using Bruner's learning theory (Theory Fundamentals), a spiral approach to additive learning, we could configure organisation's functions (disciplines) as a cylinder, with core knowledge and practice at the centre, shared by all functions at all levels (see figure). I realized that we could use blog posts to pace learning within the structure, creating a cumulative body of knowledge, supporting a fundamental learning spiral.



### Spiral Learning and Blog Posting

The emerging categories of blog post might be:

- Help and tips on Learning to Learn
- Clarification of Core/Threshold Concepts
- Explanations: theory, process, practice

- Revision support: education and training
- Repository of knowledge

The advantage of Web 2.0 based blogging, compared with a VLE blogging tool, is that a cumulative “repository” of knowledge can be developed over time, allowing future access to blog posts – open, available, easily updated and re-posted. The posts can, for example, suggest drawing on an experience reflectively. However, another post might start with an observed phenomenon, tangible event or case study. Abstract concepts could be postulated and students encouraged to experiment.

In conclusion I decided on an Action Plan:

- 1 Develop and maintain a framework for blogging.
- 2 Create a “reservoir” of blog posts and micro-blog posts.
- 3 Collect evidence of benefit to students and myself.
- 4 Seek a community of practice.
- 5 Turn everything I produce into a blog post - a tip from Saunders (2015).
- 6 See personal development in terms subject matter expertise.

## **References**

NMC Horizon Report, 2104 Higher Education Edition, Educause.  
<http://redarchive.nmc.org/publications/2014-horizon-report-higher-ed>

Accessed 19.01.2015.

NMC Horizon Report, 2010 Higher Education Edition, Educause.  
<http://redarchive.nmc.org/publications/horizon-report-2010-higher-ed-edition>

Accessed 19.01.2015.

OECD/ CERI (2008) New Millennium Learners:Initial Findings on the effects of Digital Technologies on School-Aged Learners. Paris:

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation.

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/39/51/40554230.pdf>

Accessed 19.01.2015.

Ramsden, A.(2009) Using micro- blogging (Twitter) in your teaching and learning: An introductory guide. Unpublished Discussion Paper, University of Bath.

[http://opus.bath.ac.uk/15319/1/intro\\_to\\_microblogging\\_09.pdf](http://opus.bath.ac.uk/15319/1/intro_to_microblogging_09.pdf).

Accessed 19.01.2015.

Saunders, F. C. and Gale, A. W. (2012), Digital or didactic: Using learning technology to confront the challenge of large cohort teaching. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 43(6): 847–858.

Saunders, F. (2015) Personal communication.  
<http://fionasaunders.co.uk>  
Accessed 19.01.2015..

Theory Fundamentals <http://theoryfundamentals.com/goals.htm>  
Accessed 19.01.2015.