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FRUITS OF THE VINE: REFLECTION ON PERFORMANCE-MAKING THROUGH BLOGS

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Abstract
In 2006 Drama Australia launched the VINE Project, bringing together groups of drama students within schools, universities and the broader community to make group performances based on a common theme. Using the VINE Project's multi-user blogging environment, groups or individuals maintained blogs of their performance-making processes. This allowed the work to be shared within the VINE Project community and potentially a world-wide audience.

This paper contributes to the discussion on the applications of information and communication technologies (ICT) in drama and theatre education. It considers the blog, emerging from youth web-culture, as a space for groups and individuals to reflect upon performance-making processes. A range of VINE Project participants was asked to reflect and comment upon the performance-making and blogging experience. This paper presents emerging understandings of the role of blogs in encouraging reflection, in creating a sense of group identity and significance, in validating performance-making processes and in building a sense of connection and community among student performance-makers.

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Keywords: BLOGS; REFLECTION; PERFORMANCE-MAKING; DIGITAL NATIVES; LEARNING COMMUNITIES; EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES; SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGY.

The Seed
The VINE Project germinated one winter night in 2005 under a street lamp on a busy street corner in Melbourne, where some colleagues and I had gathered after a Drama Victoria¹ committee meeting. Our conversation was about the upcoming IDEA² Congress

1. Drama Victoria is the professional association for drama educators in Victoria.
2. IDEA, the International Association of Drama and Theatre in Education, holds an international congress every three years.

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to be held in Hong Kong in 2007. We pondered the challenge of making sure that Australian students' performance-making could be presented in that international forum. Might it be possible, we wondered, to find a way to 'virtually' present students' performances? Wouldn't it be good, we agreed, if we could also share the processes that drama students and teachers are involved in when developing performances, thus privileging the process and not just the product. This conversation marked the genesis of the VINE, a Drama Australia project, initiated and co-ordinated by Drama Victoria, involving the local and international sharing of performance-making processes through social networking technology.

Cultivating the VINE project

The project title, the VINE, suggests a metaphor for growing and linking these varied and isolated performance groups together to create a community of performance-makers. It is also an acronym for 'very interesting networking experience' as we hoped the project would prove to be. The plant metaphor also built on the IDEA congress theme for 2007 which was 'Planting IDEAS'. The Project was opened to groups of drama students or participants and their teachers or arts workers, across all ages (primary, secondary and tertiary), all educational and community settings and from all states and territories of Australia and neighbouring countries. As the project concept developed, it was considered to be a way for drama students and educators to share performance-making processes as readers and writers of blogs. The process encompassed the creative development phase, the rehearsal and the resulting performance and post-performance reflection. All participating groups and individuals, as well as interested non-participants, were able to view all the blogs associated with the project, providing them with insights into the different approaches to creating a performance and the different outcomes.

The VINE Project aimed to provide:

1. An opportunity to make visible the performance-making processes; to share the different approaches to and resulting performances by groups of different ages, from different settings, places, cultures and circumstances.
2. An opportunity for drama educators to gain insights into a range of creative processes set up by other drama educators.
3. An opportunity to promote intercultural understanding and cultural exchange through the sharing of responses to a performance-making task on a shared theme.
4. An opportunity to explore the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the journaling, reflecting upon and sharing of the performance-making work.
5. An opportunity for young people to show initiative and inventiveness; to lead the way in the exploration and uses of ICT.
6. A focus for Australian drama educators and students in the lead up to the IDEA congress.
7. A way of presenting Australian drama/theatre processes and work at the IDEA congress.

Participants in the project were offered a common starting point or seed idea upon which to base their performance-making. The theme — Planting IDEAS: With our thoughts we make the world — was inspired by the IDEA congress theme for 2007. In choosing this
theme for the VINE Project we hoped it would be inviting, challenging and open enough to inspire a broad range of performances that would also reflect what young people are thinking about themselves, their world and their place within it. The VINE Project ran for two years, from the beginning of 2006 to the end of 2007.

In order to encourage connections among those involved in the VINE Project, a purpose-made multi-user blogging environment (http://vineblogs.net) was set up with assistance provided to Drama Victoria by Deakin University’s Institute of Teaching and Learning. The creator of edublogs.org, James Farmer, was then working in the Institute and was willing to host vineblogs on the edublogs server. The vineblogs site opened in January 2006 and by mid 2007 over 200 blogs had been created as part of the project. Among those creating blogs were individuals or groups of primary and secondary drama students, university students (in particular pre-service drama education students), community theatre groups and practicing drama teachers. The project was designed to lead up to and conclude at the IDEA congress in July 2007. However, as it developed, the relationship to the congress proved to be less important for many project participants than the web-based platform for writing about and sharing their drama work, as they reflected on performance-making and their experience of the process. Blogs continued to be created on the vineblogs site until the end of 2007.

At the start of the project the idea of a blog was still very new to some students and teachers so there was a degree of novelty involved in using them. For those students already engaged in web-based writing using social software such as MySpace and Facebook, blogs provided a relatively familiar ‘play space’. Blogs were chosen for the project over other internet-based options because they are easy to make, easily accessible and easy to use. Using the various blog hosting sites, they can be created and maintained at no cost, they don’t require any understanding of HTML syntax, page formatting or any of the complexities involved in creating and maintaining a web site and yet they function as a web site. We were aware that reflection on performance-making has often been in the form of a journal and blogs are designed for journaling. They provide a space for people to reflect and publish their thoughts and have these automatically preserved, reverse chronologically, in an on-line diary form.

In the VINE Project, the blogs were set up and maintained by individuals or by groups, as collaborative spaces, where a number of members of the group could contribute to the blog. However, the most important advantage of the blog for this project was that its online presence allowed it to be read by others and provided an easy means for others to post comments, thereby facilitating the opportunity for feedback to be offered and conversation to take place.

**The blog as a space for students’ reflective thinking on performance-making**

Traditionally in drama classes, reflective thinking has occurred in class discussions, in reflective writing and often in the form of a journal or folio. As an alternative, the VINE Project proposed the blog as a space for students’ reflective thinking. Reflection on

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3. James Farmer, formerly of Deakin University and who is founder of the educational blog site edublogs.org designed the multi-user blogging in consultation with Jo Raphael who is a Deakin Lecturer and Drama Victoria member. Since the conclusion of the project at the end of 2007, edublogs.org has been recommended to educators as an alternative site for drama blogs. Edublogs.org, using the same WordPress software, provides blogs and multi-user blogging environments specifically for educators and students and users.
performance-making processes is something that drama educators build into the curriculum for students and often make part of the assessment. Such reflection is an important part of the assessment requirements of senior secondary school curricula in drama and theatre studies. Not surprisingly, the majority of blogs created as part of the VINE Project were by senior secondary drama students and their teachers who were using the blog to do something that the students would previously have done on paper.

When students are involved in the work of developing performance they are required to reflect on the decisions they are making as artists in creating an effective performance for the intended audience and purpose. In the creative process they are reflecting in practice. With the benefit of a little more time and perspective, or distance, they reflect on their practice (Taylor, 2000). Increasingly aware of the need to encourage metacognition, educators are asking their students to think about their thinking in the artistic processes of performance-making. While drama learning is experiential, educators want to develop an awareness in students of what they are learning and how they are teaming from their experience. In a busy practical activity-based subject like drama where it is easy to fill all the available time with creating and making, the time for contemplation, rumination and reflection can be difficult to find. Prensky (2001b) argues that this is something that needs particular nurturing for young people of the current generation, his so-called Digital Natives, who have grown up with high-speed digital technologies. He contrasts this to the experience of the earlier generation of Digital Immigrants (Prensky, 2001a), often their teachers, who have had to learn to use digital technologies as adults and in doing so, experience the same challenges and difficulties as one might when learning a foreign language as an adult. He claims:

In our twitch-speed world, there is less and less time and opportunity for reflection, and this development concerns many people. One of the most interesting challenges and opportunities in teaching Digital Natives is to figure out and invent ways to include reflection and critical thinking in the learning . . . but still do it in the Digital Native language. We can and must do more in this area. (Prensky, 2001b:5)
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For me, the move to explore blogs for educational purposes was student-initiated when, in 2005, a student came to me to negotiate whether she could submit her assignment as a blog. After taking a virtual tour of a range of blogs guided by my student, I agreed that it would be a good idea. The blog is a young person’s medium. As Dickey (2004) found, students are attracted to blogs because they ‘have emerged out of youth web-culture. Blogs have the cachet of being progressive and perhaps even a bit counter-cultural’ (ibid.: 204-228). The popularity of blogs has exploded in recent years and of the tens of millions of blogs that exist, it has been claimed that 90% of them are for bloggers between 13 and 29 years of age (Eide and Eide, 2005). Along with the growing popularity of blogs there has been a steadily increasing amount of research and commentary on the educational potential of blogs (Williams and Jacobs, 2004; Downes, 2004; Ray, 2006; Penrod, 2007; Windham, 2007; Witte, 2007).

Researching the VINE

The VINE Project was not originally set up with a research focus although many comments, ideas and stories of engagement in the project came forth. It soon became apparent that the very interesting understandings emerging from drama students’ engagement in reflection through blogs required substantiation and were worthy of further investigation and analysis. With this in mind, a case study was set up early in 2007. This study involved a class of year six students who had a drama session once a week with a specialist performing arts teacher. This was one of three year six classes in a large outer suburban school, working with the specialist teacher on the VINE project for the duration of one ten week term. Students worked in small groups to create short performances based on the shared theme and reflected upon their progress and processes in a class blog during class time as soon as practicable after each drama session.

The study sought to understand something about the role that writing, reading and commenting using blogs may play in encouraging reflection upon performance-making processes and in building a sense of connection among students as a community of art-makers. Research questions included:

1. How might we encourage and promote a sense of students as performance-makers?
2. How does drama teaching and learning change when blogs are introduced?
3. How does reflection on performance-making processes through blogs affect reflective thinking and practice?
4. In what ways do blogs within a multi-user blogging environment allow students to see themselves as part of a community of theatre-makers?

The data included the blog entries written by the students during the project over the ten week term, semi-formal interviews with three groups of around 6-8 grade six students and interviews with the performing arts teacher and classroom teacher. Notes of observation were made, including observation of the students’ performances of their plays at an assembly. In addition, notes of observation were provided by university drama education students who were invited to read and post comments to the students’ blogs.

4. The case study formed one of a number of case studies conducted through the University of Melbourne, and approved by the University of Melbourne Ethics Committee. See Raphael (2008)

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You would never get kids saying, ‘Oh I took my learning journal home from drama and wrote a couple of paragraphs’. The engagement is huge when you have got kids writing at home. I haven’t set it as homework at all but they are doing it anyway. The kids are engaged and motivated to write and to reflect — you can’t beat that!

(Year 6 teacher)

The groups of year six students involved in the VINE Project and interviewed for the case study were asked to talk about their experiences of blogging. Their initial comments suggested that the novelty of the blog motivated them to write.

‘I found it really cool because it’s a new way and it’s different’.

‘It’s a fun thing to do’.

‘I’m more likely to do it’.

When asked to compare blogs with other methods of reflecting on their performance-making, student vinebloggers suggested that blogs have many advantages over a paper journal. The ability to type rather than hand-write was the first advantage mentioned by these Digital Natives.

‘It is easier because you can type’.

‘It’s easier than writing it down on paper’.

‘We have kept a diary like a little book, everyone rushed it because they didn’t think it was that important so this really just changed everything’.

The drama teacher had previously provided the students of this class with a time at the end of each lesson to write some reflective notes in their drama journals. Experience had taught her that the majority of students would not write anything if reflection was delayed and they were asked to do it at home. Without a set of computers in the drama room the blogs had to be written outside of the drama class time. Rather than being a disincentive to reflecting and writing, the blogs actually motivated students to write more and in their own time.

‘With the journals you were a bit rushed but with the blog you could do it at home and spend ages on it’.

‘You can do it when you’ve got a spare minute. You don’t have to do it during drama time – because you are rushed during drama time. We can do it at home’.

‘You have more time. You can really think about it’.

‘It felt better to blog because you don’t have like all your friends around you so you don’t feel embarrassed to write up your true feelings and opinions. Just being by yourself when you are writing it feels a lot better’.

From the above comments the students appeared to be taking the time for reflection that Prensky (2001b) argues is so lacking yet necessary for the digital natives. In addition, the students gained the distance for reflection on practice that Taylor (2000) describes as being essential. While taking time and having distance can have an effect on the quality of writing, the sense of audience for the blogs was also seen to have an impact on quality. One of the most significant features of the blogs for the students was their reach beyond the normally closed cycle of production, evaluation and feedback and the benefits derived from moving beyond this normally closed loop (Levin, Burbules and Bertram, 2005). In contrast to a traditional paper journal written by the student and read by the teacher,
blogs are perceived by students to have a much wider audience and, according to some, this compels them to think more about what they are writing and affects how they feel about it as the following comments suggest:

‘Other people might read it so you think more about what you say’.
‘Blogging makes you put more depth in it because you know other people are going to read it’.
‘It is better because you feel like you are writing to everyone. Everyone can read it . . . if you do it in your book no one can see it but if you do it on the internet everyone can see it’.
‘Writing on the internet is more interesting and people from all over the world can read it — not just our peers. You feel like it can have an influence on people everywhere in the world’.

It is not clear from the data to what extent the blogs enhanced the performance-making work, however, students claimed that writing the blogs was helpful in their performance-making because of the way the writing allowed them, as a group, to record thoughts and ideas and remember what they had done.

‘Yes, freeing your mind and just getting all the ideas in your head out there’.
‘I think because you are recording what you did, you can remember the things you did right and wrong and the stuff you can improve. You can remember it better’.

Although not necessarily adopting the project theme for their performance-making, several groups of students studying Drama or Theatre Studies for their Victorian Certificate of Education\(^5\) maintained group blogs on vineblogs for their semester-long performance-making task. These blogs helped fulfil the requirement for students to describe, analyse and evaluate their performance-making techniques in either their original ensemble performance-making task (Drama, Unit 3) or their development of a playscript for production (Theatre Studies, Unit 3). In these cases the blogs provided a site where ideas could be generated and developed through collaboration. One year 12 student described the benefit of the blog:

It was helpful. It meant we could track the evolution of the project, note down important stuff and generally follow our train of thought better! It also meant that we could communicate ideas overnight or over the weekend when we didn’t see each other without having to make a phone call — so it was simpler and more leisurely and in some ways more precise. Also it was nice to have people comment.

The key knowledge and skills developed by students through their ensemble performance-making and playscript production processes need to be recalled by students for their end-of-year written examination. The blogs provided a record of this learning for students to revisit what they had done several months prior to the exam.

**Withering on the VINE**

As one student sadly explained, ‘Technology is bad sometimes’. Who is left behind when the technology is used? Literally hundreds of blogs were created as part of the VINE Project; however, for every one that flourished there was at least one that

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\(^5\) Students in Victorian schools can study Drama and/or Theatre Studies as subjects in their final two years of schooling, when completing the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)
withered away after only one or two posts. When asked about the reasons why, students talked about lack of time and difficulty at times gaining access to computers and the internet.

What factors contributed to students ability to sustain their blogs? The social aspect of the blogs proved to be a motivating factor and students felt encouraged to write more when they received comments.

"If you get comments it's encouraging and you think wow, maybe I might get another one so you write more'.

The inverse of this was also true. If students didn't receive comments or felt like there was no audience, there was a potential loss of incentive for writing.

"Not a lot of people would comment and that got me down a bit. I wrote every week but no one would comment but some blogs did get comments'.

Some teachers used the blogs as a way to keep track of their students' progress. They posted encouraging comments and sometimes questions to promote reflection. This kind of teacher involvement helped provide impetus for student blogging but the time and commitment to do this proved difficult for some teachers to sustain.

Blogging, Ethics and Privacy

Engaging in writing on the World Wide Web inevitably brings with it issues of ethics and censorship. In an endeavour to provide security and ensure appropriate postings, including comments, the VINE team provided a privacy statement as well as protocols for bloggers:

Vineblogs potentially have a worldwide audience and this presents opportunities as well as responsibilities. The vineblogs community itself will involve a diverse range of participants and will need to be respectful of differences in age, gender, culture and religion. It is expected that each group involved in the project will have a designated teacher/director who is responsible for generally overseeing uploads/downloads. Teachers were reminded to fully inform participants of the implications of web-based sharing according to schools' ICT policies and to limit personal information and details that might identify individual students. Advice was also provided about the moderation of the vineblogs site, explaining that VINE administrators could remove material if necessary and blog owners could be asked to remove comments from their own site if deemed inappropriate.

Whether through good management or good luck, the VINE community seemed to be largely self-censoring and there was little evidence of offensive or inappropriate postings from within the community. The moderators did have to work hard at times removing inappropriate computer generated spam blogs (splogs) from the site but over the two years of the project only three requests were made for mildly inappropriate student posts to be removed. The VINE team was aware of the need for constant vigilance and the possibility for abuse as was this year 6 student:

"I've never seen a negative comment but people could put up a negative comment on other peoples' blogs. I've been on a few blog sites and some people put up bad comments."

6. Published on the VINE information page of Drama Australia web site http://www.dramaaustralia.org.au/thedine_main.html#info with a link from vineblogs.net

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For some students the public nature of the blogs and even self-imposed censoring meant the blogs were limiting and unhelpful. This suggests a need for private reflection that a shared blog does not provide.

I felt like it was and wasn’t helpful. Like I felt like if I was a bit annoyed in our group because we didn’t get much done then we couldn’t really like let out our negative emotions because we knew that other people would be reading it.

Despite the efforts to ensure security, the perceived fear of what might happen when students’ work is open to the world caused many students to miss an opportunity to be involved in the VINE project. Some state education systems and individual schools’ ICT policies block access to social networking sites for students and this included vineblogs. Some individual teachers had to fight to have access provided. Some teachers got around this by having students blog from home but others preferred not to do it at all rather than locate the blogging experience totally outside of the school. For some teachers the VINE project provided a legitimate reason for schools to provide access to this social networking opportunity for their students.

A community of theatre makers

The vineblogs home page served as a hub for the VINE community and provided information about the project, including: how to set up a blog, video tutorials and a list of links to all blogs created as part of the project. Vineblogs provided an organised blog cluster where all members were connected by participation in the same project. This list of blogs allowed any visitor to the vineblogs site the ability to click and view any blog related to the project. The most recently updated blogs would appear at the top of the list of 200 blogs. It was easy to feel a sense of wonder and intrigue at the creatively named blogs and they invited closer inspection. Here is a sample:

Mad, mad world...
The Young Ones
My mum thinks I’m talented
It’s all about... ME!!!!!
Little Inventors
I was forced into making this blog
Half Glass
ZOzo’s biOg
Well that can be arranged
S2.LiL.Natz.s2
In yer face theatre
Complete Unadulterated Drama Blog!
MeRcaZ.bLoG
MUHAHAHEHOHIHU!!
Philosophise the world to nothing
Kidz Matter
Oh the blogageness
-.- mOrbIdly *0* Be&St$ -.-
The Life you could have led
If drama was a booger I’d pick it first
Circus geek and drama freak
Treesonrollerblades

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Blogs offered windows into other drama classrooms and insights into drama and performance-making practices. Drama students and their teachers could see that others were out there in different locations and often very different educational settings, doing drama and creating theatre just as they were. By simply being aware of the existence of the other blogs, even without following any of them closely, students had their work in drama affirmed. Through the VINE network, they were able to see their work as part of a wider community of theatre makers.

People actually take you seriously. When we’re not adults people don’t take you seriously but having our thoughts there and people actually wanting to read our blogs is amazing. It feels like you are actually recognised for something that you’ve done.

In some of the richer examples, students and teachers, either in the same school or in different schools, were writing and reading each other’s blogs and posting comments. Teachers’ blogs would typically include an outline of the project, assessment requirements and criteria, advice to students, links to relevant web sites, links to other blogs, reflections on progress and, in one example, podcasts of the teacher providing important instruction. The students’ blogs not only included progress reports, reflection and analysis of processes that you might find in a regular written journal but, frequently, uploaded images, iTunes song lists, embedded links to other relevant web sites, including video on YouTube, podcasts; and uploaded documents that might include, scripts, production schedules, publicity material or research related to the performance themes or style. Frequently, the study revealed students experimenting with the possibilities and add-ons that the blogs offered. In the best examples students and teachers were sharing ideas, knowledge, experience, thoughts and reflection. Not the least of this sharing was the ‘how to’ of blogging. More often than not the students were helping their teachers.

I’ve been learning with the kids. They were teaching me as much as I was teaching them how to do it. (Grade 6 teacher)

The collective of bloggers in the VINE project formed a kind of self-educating community (Burbules, 2006) in which the participants shared a common subject, working with similar tasks and aims. One student explained, ‘It’s like teaching each other and I even get to teach my parents’. For one teacher, reading the blogs was ‘fantastic professional development. I’ve got new ideas from it’. Another found it ‘Good fun, but a little like voyeurism’. Pre-service drama teachers were also able to explore the blogs for professional development and gain valuable insights into drama education settings. For the students even a small investment of time in reading other blogs could be educating or at least interesting.

‘I really didn’t have a lot of spare time to read them. The little bits here and there that I read were interesting, and I found out what a lotus diagram was from reading someone else’s blog’.

‘It was interesting to read what other groups in the class had written in their blogs about their performance-making’.

Teachers also observed the ways that blogs served to complement and extend the learning in class time.
Some students have really got into it and are right into uploading pictures etc. A lot have also spoken about reading each other’s (blogs) and learning/getting ideas from them. It has made it a lot easier in class when there is so little time for discussion.

(Year 12 teacher)

Blogs, Self-Expression and Performance

Through the blogs teachers, individual students and groups of students found a means of self expression and group identity. This was expressed when students chose their blog names, layouts and appearances from the many themes provided by the software. They also customised these and further individualised their blogs by adding their own photos and images. Another opportunity for expression came through their text as evidenced in this example of a first blog entry. The style of writing is typical of many student blog posts:

May 5th, 2006
woow we're sooo clever, I'm so proud of us!! alrightie. finally, I kinda got this whole blog thing on the go. vroooom. (((It’s OJ by the way))) this class is a ‘blogging class’. it's rather amusing, frustrating, but funny. ‘aaaah I can’t do this!! it’s not working!!’ hee hee hee. really, Thank God for Sunnie here, else I’d be looost. Anyways, this Vine Project is going awesome. very fun. sooooo exciting!! lots of ideas being thrown around. lots of laughs. It's all good. everyone has such awesome ideas... even if they do kinda revolve around Spoons...

Anywho... I've kinda run out of things to saaay. but yeah. time to cruise some blogs methinks.

*peace* (sic)

When considering uses of technology in drama, Carroll et al. (2006) explain that

What is clear is that there is demand from students to explore ways for the liveness of the drama learning experience to be enhanced and supported by technology. (2006:142)

This leads me to ask, ‘In what ways does reflection in the blogs enhance live experience of learning in drama?’ The blogs provided an audience as well as a degree of interactivity, with the audience shifting the reflection from a static medium into something more akin to live performance. There are aesthetic qualities to the writing of the above blog that suggest elements of performance. The text is visually interesting and has energy about it. Its text conveys mood and evokes the sounds of the language as it would be spoken. Although beyond the scope of this study, this reveals another interesting area deserving further investigation.

Growing the VINE

The VINE Project blogs reached as far as Pakistan with the help of an Australian teacher working there. However, apart from this example, there was very little international involvement in the project. There was nevertheless, some international interest in the project and some comments posted to blogs. The project was presented as both a paper and a poster at the IDEA congress in Hong Kong. Also, one community-based group of performers who had blogged their performance-making over the course of a year was able to take nine members to Hong Kong, using involvement in the project as leverage to gain funding from a range of sources.
The VINE did not grow quite as organically as intended. Take up of the project usually occurred after teachers had undertaken professional development through conference presentations and other professional development sessions. For many teachers, being guided through the blog-making process through a practical workshop and by viewing blog examples was the impetus they needed to get involved in the project. Not surprisingly, the take up of the project was greatest among Victorian teachers and students as this was where the greatest amount of promotion and related professional development occurred.

As a professional association, Drama Victoria also facilitated and encouraged VINE project partnerships. There were some interesting exchanges on a local and national level as these three examples show:

1. Students in a rural setting and students in a city setting worked on the same performance-making task as set up through collaboration between their teachers. During the production process the city and rural students read and commented on each other’s blogs. The culmination of this project included the swapping of video recordings of their completed performances.

2. Groups of senior students in neighbouring schools, one a government school and the other a private school, blogged their ensemble performance-making on the project theme and read each other’s blogs during the process. They finally met for a combined evening of their performances.

3. Pre-service drama education students from Deakin University in Victoria and the University of Tasmania shared a common assessment task and created a blog into which they uploaded their group-developed process drama lesson plans as resources for all to share.

These kinds of projects provide models for sharing drama practice through blogs and, in the post VINE project environment, partnerships such as these can and should be fostered using alternative blog sites. Through these kinds of partnerships the interesting work begun in the VINE project will continue to be developed.

Conclusion

The VINE Project provided an opportunity for students and teachers of drama to share their performance-making experiences and to feel a part of a wider community of theatre-makers. The blogs provided a means of individual and group expression that was attractive to students and motivated them to write and read about drama. Blogs also serve to motivate students in their reflecting and writing because they involve an audience and an opportunity for feedback through comments. They are also a way of engaging students with learning that taps into their digital social networking interests. The VINE Project engaged students with blogs at a time when they were still something of a novelty for many. Already new social networking tools have been developed and it is inevitable that something even better suited to our purposes will emerge in the future.

Early in 2008, after two years of operation, the vineblogs site was closed to new blogs. Several teachers contacted us for advice on where to go to make blogs for their new groups of students. Clearly the project had created a demand for blogs and left us

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7. These were presented at the Drama Victoria professional development days and conferences during 2006 and 2007 and at the Drama Australia National Conference in Sydney in 2006.
thinking about the ways we might continue to provide opportunities for drama students to share their performance-making and teachers to share their practice. While several blog providers exist for making blogs, in the absence of a multi-user blogging environment specifically for drama students, we need to facilitate partnerships so that these groups can locate and access each other’s blogs.

One of the most striking outcomes of the VINE Project was the uptake of the technology by drama teachers when they could see that it was both simple enough to use and a means of better engaging drama students in the sort of learning experience that they valued: making performances, reflecting on the processes and opening up the discussion. Over the course of the project several drama teachers commented that, much to their own surprise, they were now seen as leaders in the use of social networking technologies in their schools. The blogs had also, in a way, provided glimpses into drama classrooms to reveal the important thinking taking place beneath the tip of the performance iceberg. One drama teacher explained the impact of involvement in the VINE project in this way:

It is pretty unique that the drama program was the first to trial this new ICT way of the world. It has changed people’s perceptions of the arts and of drama. That really makes me feel fantastic.

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*NJ, 32:1, 2009*


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