E-learning a powerful tool for teaching the arts

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Learning in dance and drama has traditionally involved face-to-face tuition, but that may change following Victoria University research into the potential of online tuition.

Research by Victoria's Faculty of Education shows students may be able to learn just as effectively using technology and the expertise of online dance and drama specialists.

An 18-month research project funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative Fund involved designing and teaching dance and drama programmes to Year 6-8 students in North Island primary schools, using specialist teachers who were available online. The students followed specially designed web-based programmes and used a range of technology to record their work and interact with the teachers.

Work prepared by the students both before and after they completed the project was judged by a panel of experts and in almost all cases significant improvements were noticed.

One of the researchers, Delia Baskerville, a drama lecturer in Victoria's School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, says the results confirm that arts e-learning has strong potential to support the work that teachers are doing in the classroom.

"It is a curriculum requirement that students in Years 1-8 are offered opportunities to learn the performing arts. But many teachers lack

confidence in this area and that is exacerbated by the fact that they receive very little tuition during teacher training to help them gain the skills, knowledge and attitude needed to succeed."

In the dance programme, students learned a series of movements by watching a DVD. They then put the movements together in different ways to create their own unique dance sequences. Their dances were videoed and uploaded on the Internet where they could be viewed and commented on by the specialist dance teacher.

The drama students' task was to produce a character idea for a non-violent video game and design a voice for an avatar. Ms Baskerville introduced herself through her own avatar and became the voice coach, providing feedback on voice files uploaded into WeLCom, a virtual learning environment.

She says the benefits for students included better technology skills, clearer and more effective use of their voice and more confidence to speak in front of others and share ideas in a group.

"The teacher told us how motivated and excited the students were about the project, particularly boys. The students were often asking when it was time to do eDrama."

One of the most rewarding outcomes for Ms Baskerville was the impact the programme had on the teachers themselves.

"It was a really positive learning experience for them. One teacher had been quite scared about using computers and new technology and her confidence really increased as she learned alongside her students.

"They also found good crossover with other learning, particularly reading and oral language."

Ms Baskerville says the model used by researchers has huge potential to build confidence among generalist primary teachers in being facilitators of both arts and technology learning.

"It's also a way of keeping the students engaged. In the 21st Century, students can discover a lot of what they want to know—they can just tap into the Internet pretty much wherever they are. Classroom learning has to be exciting and compelling to keep students wanting to be there."

Provided by Victoria University