Connect 2.0: A collaborative partnership for creative change

By Sandy Phillips and Mary Manning

Rationale – The VELS

The use of web 2.0 has fostered a major shift from the dominance of independent study to more collaborative and interactive learning. This is reflected in the expectations of the Curriculum currently being implemented in Victoria, Australia known as the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/about/index.html.
The focus of the VELS is to enable students to develop as expert learners – creative, active, inquiring, independent thinkers. This curriculum therefore focuses on the learner and their capacity to apply a range of interdisciplinary skills which underpin traditional, discipline-based learning **http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/essential/interdisciplinary/index.html**.

Within this curriculum, it is expected that students learn within an ICT-rich environment, work in a collaborative way, create new knowledge and share it with each other and with a real audience. The emergence of web 2.0 technologies provides an ideal medium for this curriculum model to be realised.

The Partnership

This paper outlines the journey made possible through the ongoing partnership and shared objectives of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the School Library Association of Victoria in identifying, sharing and exploring the potential of the best possible online resources for 21st Century learning. DEECD supports these with a variety of online spaces, programs and resources (**http://www.education.vic.gov.au/connect/** and **https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/**). SLAV likewise supports these objectives through the provision of professional learning for its members in school libraries **http://www.slav.schools.net.au/downloads/13others/prolrnMM.pdf**.

The Project

In order for this journey to be realised, planning, research and direction were required. SLAV offered a number of presentations at conferences about podcasting, wikis, blogs and how students were using the web 2.0 environment. An example by Education and ICT Consultant, Cecilie Murray is available on the Past Papers section of the SLAV website. See:
http://www.slav.schools.net.au/downloads/08pastpapers/28web20/web2_murray.pdf.

To support and extend this, SLAV and DEECD worked together to establish a safe blogging environment to operate as the collaborative community in which teachers shared their learning, successes and challenges. Demand was there from SLAV members to 'have a go', and many teacher-librarians were leaders in establishing web 2.0 learning opportunities for the rest of their staff.

These elements, along with commissioned research focusing on the effective use of online collaborative software in learning and teaching, provided the evidence-base and rationale for the ongoing collaboration. The commissioned research, carried out by Pam Macintyre and Ric Canale (2008) from The

> **. . . these collaborative online communities were highly successful in terms of student engagement and learning.**

University of Melbourne, studied teachers and students in a number of schools involved in DEECD Global Teacher and Global Student Projects. The findings indicated that these collaborative online communities were highly successful in terms of student engagement and learning.

Learning with web 2.0 . . . Re-imagine . . .

The project focused on the delivery of 'learning with web 2.0', a self-paced, program to over 600 teachers and teacher-librarians, many working in collaborative school groups led by the teacher-librarian. Emphasising learning through play and providing the support of online mentors, the program immersed participants in the social networking and interactive online environment their students find so engaging.

This 'learning with web 2.0' program was based on the success of the '23 things' program that introduced many educationalists to web 2.0. This web-based program was created by Helene Blowers of the Charlotte and Mecklenberg County Public Library in the USA for her own staff's professional development and was then made available to all via a creative commons licence. See: **http://plcmclearning.blogspot.com/**.

Yarra Plenty Regional Library (YPRL) in Melbourne, Victoria had taken it up for their staff, municipal employees, and then for all public library staff across Victoria. Through the SLAV partnership with the State Library of Victoria, we were able to talk with YPRL about the possibility of working with our partnership on the delivery of a web 2.0 program suitable for schools. SLAV took on the responsibility of adapting the program for schools in Victoria, recognising their concerns in relation to cyber safety. The blocking of social networking and web 2.0 sites was common in Victorian schools and because of this alternatives such as Teacher Tube were identified. The program *Victorian School Libraries Learning with Web 2.0 . . . Re-imagine . . .* was staged between April and August 2008 with the support of mentors and tracking by the Yarra Plenty Regional Library team. This program is available at: **http://elearning.globalteacher.org.au/**.

The DEECD blogging environment, Globalteacher **http://globalteacher.org.au/ and** Globalstudent, **http://globalteacher.org.au/** became the space to deliver the program and this facilitated a further example of shared learning by the partnership of SLAV and DEECD. This space has since evolved to include thousands of teachers and students blogging to support their own learning and the learning within their communities.

This environment has provided opportunities for global connections in terms of collaborative projects for schools, but is also a freely available professional learning resource which can be used and modified by educators and educational systems across the world. A tried and true success for teachers new to the digital world, it provides a scaffold to learning, with the application and potential of these web 2.0 tools explored and available for the global education community.

Upon completion of this online program, participants offered reflective comments acknowledging that this initiative was a timely means of encouraging change in teaching practice (see: **http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=dc42qjnq_3fv9w8cc5**). Participants' enthusiasm has not only ensured the sharing of further initiatives in the ever-changing web 2.0 environment, but teacher-librarians now see themselves, and are seen, as taking a vital role in changing teaching practice – in fact in many cases, they are leading the change.

This vital leadership role is reflected in the SLAV blog, *Bright Ideas*, (**http://slav.globalteacher.org.au/**) which was established following the *Victorian School Libraries Learning with Web 2.0 . . . Re-imagine . . .* and has been an outstanding success in providing an opportunity for Victorian teachers to continue their learning journey and create an online collaborative community for the sharing of best practice and the showcasing of relevant examples using web 2.0 for learning. *Bright Ideas* has enjoyed over 40,000 hits since its establishment in October 2008. The cluster map also highlights the global nature of the response to this collaborative resource. See: **http://www4.clustrmaps.com/counter/maps.php?url=http://slav.globalteacher.org.au/**.

Conclusion

The successful partnerships involved in our learning journey have provided Victorian teachers and school libraries (and educators across the world) with the means to collaborate. This collaboration has taken forms

not previously possible and has provided the impetus and means to change teaching practice in ways that are both creative and positive. Solid partnerships built on a cooperative approach, sound research and quality learning opportunities have underpinned these exciting developments.

References

Blowers, H. (2007) 'Learning 2.0: All about play!' in *Synergy,* 5 (2), pp. 29-31.

Blowers, H. (2007) Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County: Learning 2.0, retrieved 20 August 2007 from **http://plcmcl2-about.blogspot.com/**.

Bright Ideas: A blog by the School Library Association of Victoria, retrieved 9 February 2009 from **http://slav.globalteacher.org.au/**.

Canale, R. and Macintyre, P. (2008) *Teacher-directed collaborative online communities: Research report*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne

Elliott, Camilla (2007) 'Lifelong learning communities with Web 2.0' in *Synergy*, 5 (2), pp. 18-21.

Manning, Mary (2008) 'Re-imagine! Your professional learning for 2008' in *FYI: The journal for the school information professional*, 12 (1), pp. 28-29.

Victorian school libraries learning with Web 2.0 program . . . Re-imagine, retrieved 9 February 2009 from **http://elearning.globalteacher.org.au/**.

This article was originally prepared for presentation at the 38th annual conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL). This conference was held in Abano Terme (Padua), Italy, from the 2nd to the 4th of September 2009. www.iasl-online.org/events/conf/2009

Mary Manning is the Executive Officer of the School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV); Sandy Phillips manages the development of the globally accessible portal for teachers called FUSE, an initiative of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in Victoria. FUSE will be a place for global educators to find, use and share educational resources to support teachers in the education of 21st Century learners.