Interacting through Blogs in Theatre/Drama Education: A Greek Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate how digital tools, such as blogs, could be used by drama teachers, already qualified on a Drama teaching postgraduate study course, in teaching Theatre/Drama Education in schools in Greece, and to record the ways in which they could interact through blogging with their students and similarly ways in which their students could interact between themselves. In order to attain this, a small-scale case study was planned and developed, with an interdisciplinary approach. Drama teachers and their students were asked to build and develop their blogs concerning drama and theatre education and then use them in Theatre/Drama lessons. After applying this with their students for some time, drama teachers were asked to express their personal views and perceptions. Their responses showed in general a positive attitude towards the integration and use of blogs in teaching Theatre/Drama courses in schools, because they appear to increase the interactivity between teachers and their students and to provide them both with opportunities to further develop their dramatic and digital skills either within or outside a school environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technologies[1] and the incredible growth of social media, over recent years, have presented educators with a variety of means and with many opportunities and challenges to make use of these digital tools. "Digital technologies are important in the theatre world because many conceptions of the present-day theatre space have been shaped by these technologies" (Jensen 2011: 226). Nicholson also pointed this out in the early days of the digital evolution at the beginning of the 21st century, in the conclusion of her book *Teaching Drama 11–18*;

> Drama is a fluid, dialogic and ephemeral art form, involving interaction between participants, but it is the languages of drama, including those associated with new technologies, which enable the physical creation of emotional and conceptual meanings in space and time. New digital technologies, for example, not only have the potential to become creative means of communication in themselves, but also in the drama classroom can provide a link between thought and practice by capturing and framing dramatic moments (Nicholson 2000: 164).

Due to their increasing popularity, many teachers made continuing efforts to engage with the changes and possibilities brought by digital technologies to make the teaching and learning experience more interactive and more meaningful to their students. As Pettersson (2018: 1006) reports, "in recent years, a number of attempts have been made to elaborate on the digital competence needed for actors working in school and education (From 2017; Howell 2012; Kivunja 2013; Krumsvik 2008, 2009; Krumsvik et al. 2016)".

This reality became even more compelling and imperative from the moment that the COVID-19 pandemic, suddenly and considerably, disrupted every aspect of human life, significantly affecting all levels of education. The spread of coronavirus created serious problems in the conventional functioning of schools globally (UNESCO 2020), resulting in the immediate adoption of distant and remote lessons and communication. Responding to this unprecedented situation, schooling and education at all levels fostered widely, and in every possible way, all the innovative technologies available (e.g., digital tools, digital and mobile technologies, software programs, applications, social media, etc.) to provide at least some form of educational continuity. However, even before the pandemic era, there was significant evidence that the use of digital technologies had increased, since they provide tools and resources that can assist learning and teaching and enhance the ability of children to learn effectively (PBS 2013; The Scottish Government 2015; OECD 2015; Olofsson, Lindberg & Fransson 2017).

One of the many digital tools, available now for almost twenty-two years, are blogs: social networks in which users can post digital content on the Internet, consisting of large or small text posts, photos, hyperlinks, small videos or other digital media. The concept of blogging was born, for many web users, from a desire to express personal opinions through a daily personal calendar displaying information in reverse chronological order, with the latest posts appearing first (Luján – Mora & de Juana-Espinosa 2007; Lin et al. 2014). Blogs offer greater and more direct interactivity to their readers – visitors than most websites, as there may be an exchange of comments or even dialogue between them. Posts, of course, concern the issues of bloggers' personal interests, their opinions, activities, events, etc. However, due to their popularity and the context of freedom of speech and expression, they can also be a dangerous means of distortion or even falsification of some news or information through specific tactics or expediencies (Hans et al. 2021; Child, Haridakis & Petronio 2012). Ethics and the enforcement of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which protects EU citizens' data, are also immensely important (Euronews 2021) for Internet users' data privacy.

Blogs according to Stahl, Koschmann and Suthers (2006) constitute a knowledge-based environment that encourages, through the interaction between bloggers and their readers, content reflection and the construction of knowledge within a social context. However, even though some studies have shown improvement of learners' reading and writing skills through blogging-based writing practice (Ibanez 2022; Cantina 2022; Alsamadani 2017; Al Fadda &

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1 'Digital technologies' incorporates several terms like Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), desktop and laptop computers, Course Management Systems (CMS), Learning Management Systems (LMS) and digital media and tools such as blogs, wikis and social media (see Olofsson et al. 2015).

Al-Yahya 2010; Ducate & Lomicka 2008) others (Sanger 2010; Ozdemir & Aydin 2015; Dishaw, Eierman & Iversen 2011) argue that the individual act of reading and writing is still vital to everyone›s personal development and that the use of collaborative writing tools does not necessarily lead to more competent readers and writers.

The aim of the research discussed here is to explore how the incorporation of blogging can enhance teaching and learning in Theatre/Drama Education, how it can support and encourage interaction and communication and assist in validating drama and performance-making processes, and in creating a sense of group identity. The research questions below attempted to find answers on the aforementioned issues by involving Greek Drama teachers and their students in a case study that entailed creating and developing blogs and then using them in Theatre/Drama lessons.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Does the use of blogs increase interactivity among teachers and learners in Theatre/ Drama Education?

- Does the use of blogs in Theatre/Drama Education enhance teaching and learning and does it assist in creating a community of learners in drama and, if so, in which ways?

In the following sections, reference is initially made to the theoretical background of the impact of blogs on the teaching of Theatre. Then a small-scale case study is presented concerning the integration and use of blogs in teaching Theatre/Drama courses in schools, in order to record and assess the levels of interactivity between teachers and their students, and the impact of this intervention on teaching and learning.

USING BLOGS IN DRAMA EDUCATION

A blog in education offers a platform of electronic communication and cooperation to schools, teachers, and students of all levels of education. It can provide under certain conditions a creative environment, the interconnection of teachers and students, and their participation in electronic communities of the same or different educational objects. "In the fine and performing arts, educators are beginning to embrace digital technologies. These educators are seeking avenues of connection between new media and their art forms to enhance their classrooms" (Jensen 2011: 228). Cameron and Anderson (2009) had also foreseen the need for technology's integration in the drama classroom, but they had expressed their reservations about the possible difficulties that some of the teachers would be confronting in doing so. Swan (2004) refers to the interaction that grows within the digital environments, as a way that blogs can become the means of expression of two worlds: the one inside our mind and the other outside. Pappas (2013) also stressed that blogs may be great educational tools to provide students with freedom to publish content on the web, but if teachers are not aware of how to implement them effectively in the classroom, they will not have any impact at all.

One of a blog's strong elements is the easier and direct interconnection it provides with social media (social networks). This exploits the positive attitude of students towards social networks, since from an early age they have become familiar with all technological developments. In order to achieve a positive educational result, the general process of socialization and integration of young people into the digital society is encouraged through the exchange of views and messages, co-operation and the integration of digital material. According to a survey by the educational blogging platform Edublogs (Morris 2018) on how educators and students are using blogging globally in the classroom and what are its benefits, most respondents were teachers and students from primary, middle, and high schools in the USA (61.7%) followed by Australia (10.2%), Canada (7%), the United Kingdom (4.5%), and a few other locations. These respondents mainly use blogs for class blogs (28.6%) or class blogs with student blogs (29.3%). The three most common reasons for using a class blog were to share with families, for assignments/homework, and to share links. The three most common reasons for using students' blogs were for practising reading/writing, reflective blogging, and assignments. Compared to an equivalent 2016 survey, class blogs showed a slight increase. However due to its small sample, the report only provides a snapshot of how blogs are being used in certain schools and doesn't necessarily reflect true global trends. A research study, conducted by Garcia et al.

(2019), found that students' learning can be enhanced using blogs, but the recognized benefits are influenced by students' attitudes towards the use of technology, their perceived usefulness of blogs, and previous blog experiences.

Apparently, the nature of posts as publicly visible to many audiences and the ability to receive comments and feedback remains very important, imprinting blogs' interactivity and therefore constituting teaching and learning as something more than a two-way process. Blogs furthermore, allow for 'asynchronous' interaction, meaning each person can be involved at a different time and also outside the classroom environment which entails expanding perceptions of time, space and relationships. In other research Luján-Mora and de Juana-Espinosa (2007), mentioning some of the possible barriers, advise that the use of weblogs may increase the time spent in managing the course compared to traditional courses and teachers may find it difficult to assess student participation in the blog as there are several indicators to consider: group grading, individual posting, quality of posts, as well as subjectivity versus qualitative appreciations. Of course, if the blog is public it can also suffer trust issues, troll infestations and inaccurate, incorrect and insulting comments.

Blogs can be used by teachers and students in Theatre/Drama classes for personal and academic reflection, replacing the traditional Drama process and working instead as an interactive record of students' drama pieces, performance and progress. They can also be kept by students individually, in small groups or as a single blog for undertaking various projects and group activities in and outside the classroom. Posts can contain photos, videos or moving scenes with related topics or themes for drama plays. Raphael (2009) pinpoints that even in cases where blogs have been used as part of a drama learning task which might not be as appealing, the fact that they are being used as a social networking experience means that blogs provide an advantage. Cameron and Anderson (2009) also referred to the emerging opportunities for drama educators that the growth of digital technology and social media has generated.

They pinpoint that several writers contributed to the book 'Drama Education with Digital Technology' providing arguments 'that one impact of digital technology on drama education is the ability to extend the life of the dramatic beyond the boundaries of the physical space in which it may originally, or ultimately, be enacted' (Cameron & Anderson 2009: 15). As also quoted by Jensen (2011):

> Drama education researchers like Carroll, Anderson and Cameron similarly argue that while drama teachers must remain committed to teaching the live art form, 'technology often can and does enrich and extend the imagination of students.' Recognizing the tension that drama/ theatre teachers might feel between the real and the mediatized they continue, 'If we allow the mediatised and the live to become a dichotomy, we are in danger of losing our young students/audiences as they seek relevant performance forms in the mediatised world they have been born into (Carroll, Anderson & Cameron, 2006: xvi, in Jensen 2011: 228).

In a large project (VINE), which took place from the beginning of 2006 to the end of 2007 and in which over 200 blogs were created, individuals or groups of primary and secondary drama students, university students (in particular pre-service drama teachers), community theatre groups and practising drama teachers were invited to discuss their ideas, thoughts and reflections on each other's performance making and their own experience of the process (Raphael 2009: 128–148). An important outcome of the VINE project was drama teachers' acceptance of the technology by admitting the ease of use of blogs and that they constitute a better approach for attracting students in the kind of learning they intended for them. Teachers also described that, thanks to blogging, students who were normally shy and quiet, or whose voices were overlapped by more vocal members of the drama class, changed their attitudes and 'raised' their voices. Raphael (2009) stressed that drama educators "encourage young people to think and reflect on drama practice often in class discussions and through reflective writing in the form of a journal, a log book or a folio, therefore blogs are especially useful in Drama Education, because they are designed as online journals and provide the blank pages for a drama log book with each entry, or post, automatically archived in chronological order" (Raphael 2009: 133). In that respect the project revealed many opportunities for drama students to develop their writing and creative skills further, especially as creativity constitutes

an important feature of drama performance and a blog's imaginative content. Blogging may also be considered as a space for groups and individuals to reflect upon performance making processes. In relation to teaching, blogging opened up many opportunities to the teachers who participated, including pre-service teachers, since it acted as a place of exchanging practices and information, therefore adding to their professional development and making them feel part of a wider community of theatre makers (Raphael, 2009). Also, Luehmann, in his 2008 study, supports the potential of blogging for teachers' professional identity development; whilst Mian (2018) believes that blogging on specific topics provides students with the opportunity to develop their independent research skills and also see and comment on each other's research, therefore expanding and developing their own knowledge and understanding.

Addressing the question of how reflection in blogs can enhance the live experience of learning in drama, Raphael (2009) answers that blogs provide an audience as well as a degree of interactivity with that audience, which suggests that the blog shares some of the qualities of live performance. Anderson et al. (2009) explain the strong relationship and common characteristics between technology and drama classroom students since the latter, apart from engaging in technology very easily in their everyday classroom routines, control much of their own learning in drama classes since they use the body and enactment as central to the approach. That accords with Raphael's (2009: 133) statement: 'Drama is, after all, a social art form with students working in groups and ensembles to create drama. The blog is a social space in which the group sharing can be continued beyond the face to-face class time'. According to Flintoff (2010) blogs seem to encourage reflection which is one of the key strengths of drama education. Flintoff (2010) stresses that, as a process, reflection is now considered essential to student-centred learning in all educational settings and "while drama is seen to be aligned with similar reflective processes across the curriculum there are certainly possibilities for extending the use of blogs to establish and explore characterization, narrative development and even as a performance form in their own right" (Flintoff 2010: 4).

Two specific examples, illustrating participatory interactions with new media that can be effectively utilized in drama settings, are provided by Jensen (2011). In the first, a community-based theatre and performance residency program in the United States called Place: Vision and Voice, started in 2000 by the Arizona State University's Department of Theatre, 'demonstrated how the principles of play, performance, collective intelligence, and negotiation might work in a setting that combines drama and media' (Jensen 2011: 230). The program designed by Stephanie Etheridge-Woodson combined drama and new media tools to engage young creators in conversations about their community as they worked to 'process and negotiate adult-arbitrated landscapes to create and re-create their own identities' (Etheridge – Woodson 2004: para. 1 in Jensen 2011: 230). There has been a collaboration between young people and the university's adult facilitators by creating digital stories that have incorporated music, graphics, and video elements and then been combined with live process drama activities, devised by the young people, including:

> creative movement, creative writing and scripted presentation and the end product was brought back into their unique communities. The performances, which explored notions of authority and regulation as they played out in their lives, were then used as conduits for conversations amongst themselves and the adults in their communities. According to Woodson, the project aided students in understanding and creating a space for democratic dialogue, taught young people how to effectively elicit response on critical issues affecting their lives, and opened up communities for open conversations (2004) (Jensen 2011: 230).

In the second example Jensen (2011) explains how an in-school project, in which student participants engaged in new media to extend and expand a drama story that they were developing together in their classroom, was created by drama educators Carroll and Cameron in order to demonstrate how the new media concepts of simulation, appropriation, and transmedia navigation can be used in classrooms.

> Using facilitator-generated online social networking and mobile media devices, the students examined issues of mistaken identity through technologies as an exploration of themes from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. They also developed and

facilitated drama activities in which students discovered dramatic story lines and addressed themes that they would encounter in the dramatic text through multiple media platforms including email, digital still images, blogs, digital videos and mobile devices (2009: 296). The co-creators integrated these digital technologies with recognized process drama conventions, such as dramatic pre-text and role-based improvisation to create 'digital pretexts'. These environments that combined drama and media engaged students in story creation and understanding. Carroll, Cameron, and their students explored and performed dramatic texts by intermingling the conventions inherent within both theatre and media to achieve their story goals. The educators reported that students, who acted as co-creators of the technology infused drama, explored a variety of social and cultural issues important to the participants, and were especially invested in conversations about identity and power in spaces affected by digital technology (p. 309) (Jensen 2011: 230).

Fanouraki (2016: 48–57) also refers to the dramatized non-dramatized creation and application of blogs and websites in Theatre/Drama Education as well as to the self-referential and autobiographical type of blogs and websites, which are used in order to interact with the basic dramaturgy of the project (drama lesson or performance) and not only to reflect upon a project. As exemplary projects and examples of interactivity and 'dramatized creation and application of blogs and websites', she firstly refers to the project 'Cleo is Missing' by Sue Davis, which was "created by a small team of university students and aimed to explore the possibilities for creating a drama that could be enacted through cyberspaces" (Davis 2009: 149–167) and in which Davis participated, as the drama leader, managing the developing of the drama from within through the role of Cleo's friend Ivy (Cleo went missing from the university). Secondly, she refers to the 'To the Spice Islands project' in which the participants were two classes of Dutch upper primary pupils (age 10–12) and a group of Dutch tertiary drama students. The project coordinators were two Australian teachers with backgrounds in drama and web production. The online element of the drama project was built around the pretext of a website of a fictional organization, the Australian/Netherlands Maritime Research Centre (ANMR). In the 'To the Spice Islands project' as the drama unfolded and the website was taking shape, a weblog was created and then another weblog was added to the homepage, all functionally integrated in the story (Carroll, Anderson & Cameron 2006: 88–96). Fanouraki (2016: 53–54) also refers to the *Vine Project* as well as an exemplary instance of the 'non-dramatized' use of blogs which cultivates critical, dramatic and multiple skills based on blog and Theatre/Drama interaction.

Cash (2020) believes that Drama students who are not blogging for various tasks in their Drama course, are literally being 'left behind on the side of the road'. He stresses the fact that, as technology constantly develops and blogging software becomes more and more user friendly, more educators start using it in Drama discipline. For him there are plenty of reasons that Drama students can use blogging such as certain individual and/or group performance tasks. Moreover, Cash (2020) continues that in secondary schools, blogs can be used in Drama courses for several purposes and that includes: posting and publishing personal reflections of the performance making process (frustrations, successes, etc.) and post-performance experience, images of potential or actual costumes, ideas for creating scenes in Drama plays, script drafts for others to see, a record of work undertaken during a class earlier in the day, checklists of tasks to be done. For him blogging also provides students with plenty of opportunities to comment on group blogs, as a means of communicating and agreeing with classmates' ideas, and on other students' blog posts to offer advice, encouragement, support or appreciation by posting videos of rehearsals or polished scenes for classmates to see and/or offer critical feedback. Consequently, there may be frequent hyperlinking to relevant external websites about the play, ensemble topic, playwright, era, performance style, theme, theatre practitioner, etc.

In this section, a reference to the theoretical background has been made, highlighting various researchers' viewpoints on the effect of blogs on the teaching of theatre and the levels of interactivity which can be created. In the following section an attempt is made, through a Greek case study, to assess whether the incorporation of blogging can enhance teaching and learning in Theatre/Drama Education and how this can support and encourage interaction and assist in validating drama and performance-making processes.

INTERACTIVITY THROUGH BLOGGING IN THEATRE/DRAMA EDUCATION – A GREEK CASE STUDY

In order to attain a better insight into the impact that blogging has on Drama education, a small-scale case study was planned and organized for drama teachers, already qualified on a Postgraduate Study Program in Drama teaching in Greece.[2] The research was based on the interdisciplinary teaching approach by combining Theatre/Drama and the use of digital tools in education. Each drama teacher created and applied a blog together with his/her students, according to Theatre/Drama lesson aims and to his/her students' interests and learning needs. Teachers designed the lessons focusing on blog construction and the incorporation of digital technologies as well as on interactive Theatre/Drama learning and performing processes.

To that effect, their students were given the opportunity, as a project beforehand, to select a Drama/Theatre related topic and construct their own personal blog, for practising purposes so they could have a 'hands on' experience of the skills needed to develop and experience the demands of a blog's creation and what that might entail. More specifically they were asked to create Theatre/Drama blogs addressed to fellow students, teenagers and young people, in formal or nonformal education. The *WordPress* platform was used since it is free in its basic version and therefore available and accessible to everyone. The first sessions were designed bearing in mind the development of students' technological skills and their familiarization with the program and its main basic functions. These consisted of the program's existing templates, front page slider, main menu and submenu planning and designing, selection of various themes, the creation and editing of relevant and important pages, the procedure of post making, putting articles in tags and categories, files, images, movies, links and video editing, importing and other basic and useful add-ons and facilities like widgets and plugins. Thus, it was decided to dedicate the first sessions to introducing the students in detail to all the program's features to ensure they were comfortable with the technological capabilities. It was also considered important to make students aware of the various interactive software available to provide them with interactive features and, for that reason, H5P[3] was introduced. H5P content is responsive and mobile friendly, which means that users experience the same rich, interactive content on computers, smartphones and tablets alike. Users can create and edit interactive videos, presentations, games, advertisements and more. Students were also given practical examples of various other free web programs which allow the user to edit and create interactive content, learning activities and engaging quiz-based games.These included Microsoft's Video Editor, Kahoot, Wordwall, Padlet, etc.

In addition, students were provided with certain examples of Theatre/Drama Education projects and activities to use by incorporating digital technologies within their Drama courses. By choosing some of the above tools, students were asked to create innovative digital drama activities as well as to embody an interactive part in their blogs which consisted of a sensory reaction. These included the creation of students' own interactive videos with Drama/Theatre, Art and Dance related topics, acting as directors, where they could use their smartphones to record certain short scenarios, or play scenes with their own choreography, and edit them on the computer with the appropriate software, using their preferred music excerpts and incorporating sound, text as headings and photos where necessary (H5P, Microsoft Video Editor). In addition, there was the option to use external links connecting to specific video, animation, moving images or scenes (YouTube, Vimeo), interactive games using certain software (H5P, Kahoot, Wordwall), presentation software using templates, sound and videos (Microsoft PowerPoint) and slide-shows. There were also links to Google Drive, allowing collaborative writing with Google Docs and file sharing (Google Drive, Google Docs), polling and other electronic quizzes, (Kahoot, H5P, Wordwall), 'find the word' activities (Kahoot, H5P, Wordwall), 'fill in the blanks' (Kahoot, H5P, Wordwall) and word matching (Kahoot, H5P, Wordwall) which could be used with the interactive videos as desired.

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2   "Theatre and Digital Technologies in Education" which is part of the Postgraduate Study Program "Greek and World Theatre: Drama, Performance, Education" (Specialization: Theatre Didactics National and Kapodistrian University of Athens).

3   H5P is an open and free technology, licensed with the MIT license, which empowers everyone through a web browser and with an H5P plugin to create rich and interactive web experiences more efficiently. It also cooperates perfectly with the WordPress platform, among other Learning Management Systems (LMS), with the H5P plugin installed.

In parallel, students were asked to embody an interactive drama consisting of a physical reaction and a "live activity". These included instructions for physical theatre exercises based on the blog's digital material, the creation of mixed digital and live drama activities for primary or secondary education. There was also provision of specific time and space for an online or live activity or of a free choice of time and space, of physical theatre activities based on online instructions and processes, interactive rhythm exercises for preschool drama, verbal and non-verbal drama activities and conventions for primary and secondary students.

In addition, mixed activities for both drama teachers and students included digital narration and live action: the teacher, in or out of role, calls students through a digital application (video material, sound material, written etc.) to step into drama in their own space with dramatic playing and digital card activities as the drama unfolds, with kinesiology and music-based instruction using 'online songs' for children and teenagers, innovative recorded material of the drama teacher in role, which can be used in different ways in the blog's timeline, and taped pauses to allow students to interact with the teacher. Finally, social media forms and platforms (Knudsen 2018) are inserted, as original or simulations with mixed written and live actions driven by the blog's instructions; students are called to create physical or/and verbal actions and afterwards to use the chat facility on the blog and interactive drama activities, either as drama or digital story telling unfolds or as a means for teaching history, theory and praxis. One example would be to watch a video of the ancient Greek chorus and then try to shape one of the chorus members by using tableaux vivants, ritual and dance and/or interactive performance making processes by using either original or adapted drama/theatre pretexts through blogs and live action (Davis 2009: 149–167; Carroll, Anderson & Cameron 2006: 30–33; Murray 1997: 71–79; Wotzko & Carroll 2009: 168–183; Sutton 2012; Anderson, Cameron & Sutton, 2012).

Interactivity through blogging was introduced by using ICT and drama learning methods, which all focus on cultivating kinaesthetic, verbal, non-verbal, physical, digital and visual interactivity for the teachers themselves and their students through more than simply collaborative writing or posting text and other communications. The main objectives of creating and interacting with theatre/drama blogs were either teaching or performing through blogs (online and live in the classroom, home or theatre space venue). Therefore, and from a pedagogical point of view, the above digital tools were selected and presented bearing in mind that all are considered to be interactive and collaborative tools, and demonstrations and examples of their use were given in order to emphasise their student-centered and participatory learning features and stimuli. In that respect, blogging represents one of many tools that teachers are using to empower students to take initiative and discover learning and to manage their own work to organize and structure their knowledge.

Concerning these pedagogical goals, the drama teachers planned and created their blogs together with their students, choosing different Drama/Theatre, Art and Dance topics. Those included: "Antigoni", "DramaLand", "I Lab Theatre", "Thea-Edu", "Theatrical Wanderings", "Family Plays", "Nine Muses", etc. Each one, according to their chosen theme, had to build their blog using as many of the digital tools mentioned in order to provide interactive activities including interactive videos, slide shows, presentations, interactive games and quizzes to involve pupils in taking part by acting, dancing, singing, drawing, playing, etc. Some examples of the activities included: "Sing along with this video", "Look at this scene and use your improvisation to continue the scenario and then play/dramatize the scene", "Insert dialogues in these photos", "Read this poem and then draw what you think", "Direct either your own brief interactive video or collectively with the group of your fellow students", "Use your own voice to narrate a scene of a theatre play, a poem, etc." Finally, and after a sufficient time had passed, where the drama teachers had the opportunity to use blogging along with their students inside and outside the classroom, they were asked to express their opinion and views about the whole process and to reflect and comment upon their teaching and learning blogging experience and performance making in schools.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

In order to achieve this, semi-structured interviews were designed and conducted with all participating (twelve) drama teachers. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main qualitative data collection technique. "Freedom to allow the respondent to talk about what is of central significance to him or her rather than to the interviewer is clearly important, but some

loose structure to ensure all topics which are considered crucial to the study are covered does eliminate some of the problems of entirely unstructured interviews" (Bell 2010: 94). Answers were recorded and their transcripts have been analysed. Research ethics were applied and it was explained that the interviewees' identities would not be revealed. Hence, for the transcripts from the individual interviews, interviewees were coded as (Interviewee Teacher) IT1, IT2, IT3, etc. The teachers themselves acted as participant observers since, while simultaneously participating in the educational process by supporting the students, they also recorded the way in which they interacted and collaborated with them, with their classmates and with the program. Participant observation is usually used to refer to methods of data generation which involve the researcher in a research environment systematically observing the interactions, relationships, actions, events within it (Mason, 2018). The method of their recording was through short written notes, either during their classes or immediately after they ended, when everything was still very fresh in memory. These notes were about pupils' verbal expressions, grimaces and exclamations of joy or disappointment! The oral opinion of the students was also recorded in subsequent teaching hours, where feedback was given on blogs and their use by both the students and, of course, by the teachers. The teachers' main focus was on the pedagogical framework that supports collaboration through active groups among the students, the level of participation of everyone present and, of course, the degree of their interaction.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF BLOGS' USE IN THEATRE/DRAMA TEACHING AND LEARNING

In this case study drama teachers reflected upon the use of blogs in Drama teaching and learning in schools. Their responses to the questions being addressed revealed interesting outcomes. In the question: "Which digital media did you use most often?" five out of twelve of the drama teachers responded that they were not using technology at all in their everyday classroom teaching and only one of them maintained a personal blog, but without using it with her students. From the digital tools available most said that they previously used videos more often (either self-edited or from YouTube), PowerPoint presentations, Google Docs, interactive activities, etc. In the question: "After taking the course "Theatre and Digital Technologies in Education", which digital tools do you think will help you in planning and implementing the teaching of Theatre Education?" the majority (eleven out of twelve) responded that they will surely incorporate blogging into their teaching and learning process:

IT1: Blogs, Google Forms, padlet.

IT4: New applications which I wasn't aware of and blogs.

IT5: Wider use of video to create a stage setting/video from materials submitted by students (their own photos, videos, recordings, etc.)/blogging/role-playing with role-playing profiles on social media or mails for older ages (secondary school kids).

IT9: Social media, video editor, blogs, applications such as padlet, wordwall, etc.

In answering the question whether they believe that "the incorporation and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) enhances Drama teaching and learning", the majority responded that indeed this provides opportunities for interactivity between teachers and students and between students themselves, that it attracts their interest, increases their fantasy, creativity and critical thinking. In the sub question whether "the use of ICT cultivates their theatre and drama skills" most teachers replied positively, although there was a negative reaction as well. Teachers also reflected that blogs can work well as a means of collaboration, due to their interactive tools and characteristics, which attract students to work as a group towards a common goal. This was apparent even in students who were not that extrovert or who were less inclined to take risks *(the respondents on the above questions had to select one answer from totally agree to strongly disagree, see Appendix, Table 1, question 11).*

As regards the question: "Would you use blogs in teaching Theatre Education and why?", all except one responded positively by stating that blogs could hold a supporting role in the teaching and learning process, acting either as a means of updating and exchanging information related to the topic or as a means of communication between all class members even outside the conventional classroom:

IT1: Yes! It helps to organise the lesson and can also provide participants with stimuli outside the lesson.

IT2: Yes, for different reasons, depending on the type of blog, for information, contact with course materials, capturing and recording the "intangible character" of the course. Mostly to have another point of reference and communication outside the classroom.

IT3: Yes, because that way we can all participate and refer to previous posts whenever we want.

IT7: Yes, because they complement the learning process and are a creative activity for children at home.

The interviewee who responded negatively, stated:

IT10: No, nor would I want to burden the kids with computer work at home, and in class I only have 40 minutes a week to do things by hand, in the here and now, time for them to create.

In answering the question: "In your opinion, what are the advantages and benefits that a blog can offer to the teaching and learning of this course?", responses included:

IT1: It makes the lesson more interesting and often improves students' written skills and consistency in writing.

IT2: Increases the interactivity between teachers and their students, produces new knowledge and a shift to more student-learning.

IT3: Filing of group work, recording of ideas, active dialogue and personal – collective expression outside the lesson as well as sources of inspiration from collected audiovisual material.

IT5: The co-creation, the recording of the various stages of work, the sense of the safe 'exposure' of the children's work, the enhancement of the contribution and co-formation, but also the communication of the members and even outside the framework of the teaching hour.

IT7: It can work as a pretext for drama, as a source for inspiration and as a medium for team communication.

IT9: Immediacy, contemporary practices, acquaintance of new generations with different types of digital tools.

IT12: It works well as an archival part and it makes it easier for students and teachers to share some of their work with a wide audience. Involvement and contribution of everyone in the lesson.

Similarly, asked to outline according to their opinion "What are the disadvantages it may have?", responses included:

IT3: Possible non-universal accessibility for practical reasons, such as the lack of access to computers or other digital technologies by some participants which creates inequalities between members.

IT6: If not treated as an adjunct, it can shift the core of the course.

IT8: It demands extra effort and time.

IT10: There is a danger for young Drama students to perceive drama performance as a digital experience and not understand the 'physical nature' of Theatre.

IT11: Technology sometimes works in a disorienting manner and leads us solely into a world of plain images and certain patterns.

Referring further to the question: "Can you distinguish which benefits it offers for teachers and which for students?" they replied:

IT1: Archiving of group work, recording of ideas, active dialogue and personal – collective expression, both in and out of class as well as sources of inspiration from collected audiovisual material.

IT3: The co-creation, the recording of the different stages of work, the sense of safe "exposure" of the children's work, the strengthening of contribution and co-creation, but also the communication of the members and even outside the framework of the teaching time.

IT4: Technology aids the preparation of the lesson and in the better approach of the teacher's goals, even though demands extra time and apparently appropriate digital skills.

IT7: For a teachers' generation that may not have or did not have the adequate familiarity with technology except in very basic, it can be an occasion for further exploration and cultivation of these digital skills, whereas for students who are familiar with digital technology, it enables the creative use of digital tools, but also makes the course 'contemporary'.

IT12: It makes the lesson more interesting and often improves students' writing and sense of consistency.

Concerning the level of difficulty that a blog creation demands *(the respondents had to select one answer from totally agree to strongly disagree, see Appendix, Table 1, question 20)* all of the drama teachers answered that for someone with basic ICT knowledge it is not difficult, therefore it does not require high technological skills. In the same respect their students seemed to face no particular difficulties in finding their way around the program or in updating and posting information on their blog. Similarly, a blog could constitute a stimulus and a motive for students and assist them to familiarize themselves with the digital aspect of Drama education. In asking the question "After participating in the course, would you try to use a blog to create an online performance or a theatre program in education?", the majority of the postgraduates replied positively, although some second thoughts were expressed depending on the context and various or certain circumstances:

IT3: Blog made performance or Internet performance can be seen positively under certain conditions which make online theatre a necessity, such as the pandemic or if students live in the 'barren line' and simultaneously questioned the role of Internet performances under 'ordinary conditions'.

Finally, on the question: "To create a performance using digital technologies, which of the ICT tools you were taught would you use?", most replied that these would be the tools most appropriate to promote the artistic and educational goal of the course, because technology should be used to assist and enhance the educational process and not simply be used as per se:

IT8: I would probably associate everything I was taught provided that it would further the educational and artistic goal of the course and not just to apply it…there is a danger that the allure of "new" can become an end in itself.

The results of the study accord with those of previous studies (Luján-Mora and de Juana-Espinosa 2007; Ducate and Lomicka 2008; Raphael 2009; Morris 2018) and justified perceptions (Cameron and Anderson 2009; Cash 2020) on the effects that blogging has on Drama education.

DISCUSSION

This study has considered the effects of blogging on teaching and learning in Drama education. It has found that there does appear to be evidence to suggest that blogging enhances teaching and learning and that it increases interactivity between drama teachers and their students. Of

course, due to the small sample of the study, the results cannot be generalized. It seems that one of the biggest impacts that digital technology can have on education is that it enables social and collaborative interaction between all parties, who can then actively build their knowledge and understanding. For teachers blogging is an additional creative and interactive tool which provides a stimulus in and outside the classroom. Luehmann (2008) stresses that the way in which teachers use blogging will determine the extent of the benefits they can derive from this practice. In addition, the interdisciplinary connection of Theatre/Drama Pedagogy and ICT seems to:

- open up new experiences and trials of interdisciplinary knowledge and 'Dramatic/ICT intelligences',

- deepen learning about blogs, learning about Theatre/Drama,

- recreate a new timeline of possible acts of lesson planning, drama and performance making,

- recreate teaching and designing of theatre/drama lessons, which are based on praxis, history or theory of theatre and drama education.

Therefore, the interesting outcome of mixing the interdisciplinary subjects of Theatre/Drama and ICT is that it provides students with the opportunity to combine live improvisation with digital technologies. This was apparent in the current study, through the making of blogs, by drama teachers and their students, by creating several interactive activities which involved the participants in taking a role, in dancing, in simulating collective characters, in singing, generally in making drama. Additionally, blogging for and within theatre/drama processes can be seen as an alternative form of digital theatre/drama or as a form of digital applied drama under certain, special circumstances, such as the pandemic, in which 'live(ness)' is not allowed, but also as an aid in lesson planning and performance making. In Theatre/Drama Education, human interaction, contact and communication are all vital and 'it is the uniquely collaborative nature of drama learning that while technology will always be present it will not replace the human interactivity' (Cameron & Anderson 2009: 12).

It is apparent that digital technology, and more specifically blogs, seem to play an important role, however the use of technology does not automatically lead to effective teaching and learning. Many benefits can be sought for both teachers and students, although a careful use of these resources is needed in order to avoid technology misuses (Zakopoulos 2005). The lesson learnt is that technology is a tool, not a goal. Jensen (2008: 20) also highlights that, 'arts educators must effectively engage with their students' multimodal concerns through interactions that value new multimodal literacies'. Nevertheless, as in all other subject teaching, drama teachers are invited to reflect on how they can engage their students with the rich and varied learning opportunities that digital technologies offer them. 'The teacher's role in the drama classroom of today infused (or not) with technology is the same as it always has been: to provide students with the access to the tools of creation and support their growing control of those tools to create meaning' (Cameron & Anderson 2009: 14). The latter (2009) argue that a constant commitment is needed, in researching the effect that digital technologies have on drama education in order to provide drama teachers with abundant examples, ideas and ways to extend the creative possibilities of the art form. As Murray (1997) at the end of 20th century innovatively predicted: "The violent gaming culture that now characterizes much of cyberspace is likely to spread as Internet gains speed and bandwidth. […] There are not two more difficult things to predict in this world than the future of art and the future of software" (Murray 1997: 283–284). Jensen (2011) highlights that on the debate about the positive and negative effects of digital technologies and mediatization on theatre we should admit that digital interactions and conventions make our world fundamentally different.

> Drama/theatre education practitioners have an impetus to engage in digital environments because these technologies have a direct impact on conceptions of time and place, and these bring new possibilities for creative constructs and representations that new/young audiences, can identify with. […] Digital stories are the stories young audiences want to hear, and they are the stories that young artists want to tell – they are the stories of their world, their societies, their communities, and their lives (Jensen 2011: 231).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Theatre/Drama and blogging are both based on interactivity and participatory learning. Blogging for Theatre/Drama could also enhance interactive methods and processes by mixing online and live activities, incorporating physical reactions, provoking online and live questions and answers. Blogs could also be used as a primary "theme", a creative trigger and a space for introspection when practising and exploring drama/theatre. Drama blogging in education recreates alternative ways of making and reflecting on drama and theatre teaching and learning, and inspires different 'teams of combatants', theatre/drama teachers who love blogs and technologies, but it also intrigues those who still see 'the digital' under question.

APPENDIX

Table 1 Questions addressed in the semi-structured interviews.

1. Sex

2. Gender

3. Education

4. Degree of familiarity, competence and use of technology (indicate in numbers from one to ten)

5. Teaching experience (number of years)

6. Number of years teaching in primary and/or in secondary school

7. Did you use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the teaching and learning process of "Theatre Education", and before your participation in the course "Theatre and digital technologies in education"? (Y/N)

8. Which digital media did you use most often? (open answer)

9. After taking the course "Theatre and Digital Technologies in Education", which digital tools do you think will help you in planning and implementing the teaching of Theatre Education? (open answer)

10. Explain why (for planning teaching, evaluation, students' participation, etc.) (open answer)

11. The use of ICT enhances the teaching and learning process of the Theatre Education course by: (Choose one of the five choices of each sub question – Likert scale)
    a. making the lesson more interactive
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    b. making the lesson more interesting
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    c. motivating students
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    d. strengthening further their self-confidence
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    e. developing their imagination
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    f. cultivating their theatre and drama skills
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    g. developing their creativity and critical ability
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)

12. Fill in if you would like to express an additional reason (open answer)

13. Would you use blogs for teaching Theatre Education and why?

14. Do you have a personal blog? (Y/N)

15. How would you briefly describe your blog? It is a blog that: a) talks about...., b) invites users to..., c) puts them in touch with..., d) add anything else you want more specific to the purpose and use of your own blog: (open answer)

16. Would you create a blog with the students in your class or group? (Y/N)

17. In your opinion, what are the advantages and benefits that a blog can offer to the teaching and learning of this course? (open answer)

18. What are the disadvantages it may have? (open answer)

19. Can you distinguish which benefits it offers for teachers and which for students? (open answer)

20. Please indicate your degree of agreement according to the following: (Choose one of the five choices of each sub question – Likert scale)
    a. Do you find it easy to build an educational blog?
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    b. Do you think its creation requires high technological skills and knowledge?
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    c. Is it easy for students to participate in updating it?
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    d. Does it motivate them to take initiative?
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)
    e. Are students becoming familiar with digital forms of theatre in education?
       i. (totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)

21. After participating in the course, would you try to use a blog to create an online performance or a theatre program in education? (open answer)

22. To create a performance using digital technologies, which of the ICT tools you were taught would you use? (open answer)

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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