



The Role of Blogging in Learning Support Writing Classes

In 2006, I introduced blogging to my freshman composition class as a way to showcase the skills students learned during the semester. The blog—a public journal maintained on the Internet and available for reading and commentary by the worldwide audience of Internet users—was designed as a final project, something for students to polish and present to their peers instead of the usual oral presentation [“Using Blogs as Writing Journals,” *Innovation Abstracts*, Vol. XXIX, No. 11].

I was excited by how quickly and enthusiastically the students embraced the concept of blogging. They adapted quickly and explored expression beyond the written word. Many incorporated photography and video in their blogs.

The assignment combined the communication skills they developed in the course with the technological skills necessary for success in a growing digital community. Some of those students are still blogging today. It was much more than an assignment. It was an opportunity for them to find their voices.

I decided to introduce this project to my learning support writing students, assigning it at the beginning of the term instead of at the end. High failure and attrition rates indicate that learning support students rarely give themselves the time to adapt to a learning environment. If they fail, they tend to accept it as their fate and quit trying.

A huge part of the problem is transference. Students rarely apply what they learn in isolation—such as a grammar rule—to other things, such as revising their writing, or carrying those organizational and editing skills to an essay in a history class or science class. And, their performance suffers. This repeated cycle of failure, compounded by poor technological skills, silences their voices.

There is no question that learning support writing classes must focus on basic skills, such as parts of speech and sentence structure, but they must also emphasize communication, whether the communication is written or oral.

Students must learn to express their thoughts in organized and relevant ways. Blogging can help reinforce this learning, even if the students lack fundamental skills. Starting at the beginning of the course gives learning support students the opportunity to improve their technical skills along with their writing. The idea is to provide them with a relevant, real-world experience where they can push themselves and grow.

The initial assignments capitalize on non-verbal communication skills, such as selecting and posting pictures that illustrate themes or goals. We move on to selecting music videos that convey similar themes or goals.

Later, students write brief posts, such as selecting inspirational quotations and explaining why they are meaningful to them personally. A popular assignment had students creating a 10-item list of things they would like to accomplish in their lifetimes, identifying and writing about one of them.

Finally, students write concluding posts that are reflective in nature. They write about the most meaningful thing they learned about themselves during the term.

The students not only rise to the challenge of blogging; they embrace it. Their enthusiastic adoption yields secondary benefits that they carry with them for the rest of their academic careers.

Students naturally develop cohorts within the class, finding like-minded students with whom to share posts. They help each other, encourage each other, and openly share their blogs.

These cohorts may prove to be a greater benefit to their academic success than the basic skills they review in the course. In finding their voices, they find purpose and relevance in good communication. Whether or not they work toward a short-term certification or have long-term academic goals, they gain an important lesson in transference.

Maria M. Johnson, *Faculty, English*

For further information, contact the author at Georgia Piedmont Technical College, 495 N. Indian Creek Drive, Clarkston, GA 30012-2397. Email: johnsonm@gptc.edu

Suanne D. Roueche, Editor

August 31, 2012, Vol. XXXIV, No. 16

©The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

Further duplication is permitted by MEMBER institutions for their own personal use.

Innovation Abstracts is published weekly following the fall and spring terms of the academic calendar, except Thanksgiving week, by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, 1 University Station, D5600, Austin, Texas 78712-0378, (512) 471-7545, Email: abstracts@nisod.org