



How Can Students Effectively Participate in and Contribute to a Learning Community Through Blogging?

Lisa Gottfried

Touro University, Graduate School of Learning, Innovative Learning Program

Introduction

Since the inception of the school twenty years ago, students at New Technology High School have been expected to create digital portfolios to showcase their work and learning processes. The digital portfolio has been a graduation requirement from the very beginning and used to act as something of an online brochure-type website where static content lived on prescribed pages. Over the years, students and staff have grown to feel as though the portfolio has become nothing but a hoop to jump through, an inauthentic product that does not go beyond self-reflection. Students often reported that, after the portfolio was completed, no one actually used or looked at their product, not colleges, nor future employers.

The goal of the portfolio committee last year was to expand the portfolio idea to more than just an online brochure. To that end, the researcher spearheaded a move toward a blogging model, so that students could 1) teach, 2) reflect upon, and 3) document learning, all in one place. The concept was that not only could the blog posts be shared within the New Tech community, but that it would open up opportunity to share with the wider online community, both locally and globally.

According to the annual blog survey from Edublogging.com (2014), there is an upward trend toward blogging in the educational setting that has benefits ranging from increased digital citizenship awareness to encouraging students to increase the quality of their work for a public readership.

To assume that students and staff now understand how to go about implementing those three main ideas was over-reaching. This capstone explored and continues to look at how to make explicit what an effective blog looks like, using the models and concepts learned in my Innovative Learning graduate program at Touro.

Materials and Methods

All students at New Technology High school have access to their own laptops as it is a 1:1 school (2016). Every student has been expected to create a weebly website using simple guidelines for setup of pages and URL addresses so that sites have some predictable navigation and are easy to find on the web.

Students in grades 9-11 continue to have access to a series of video tutorials. Moving forward, students will be introduced to portfolios in 9th grade and will be expected to continue to work on their portfolios throughout their career through their advisory classes. Certain times have been set aside throughout the year as a whole school to work on school portfolios/blogs.

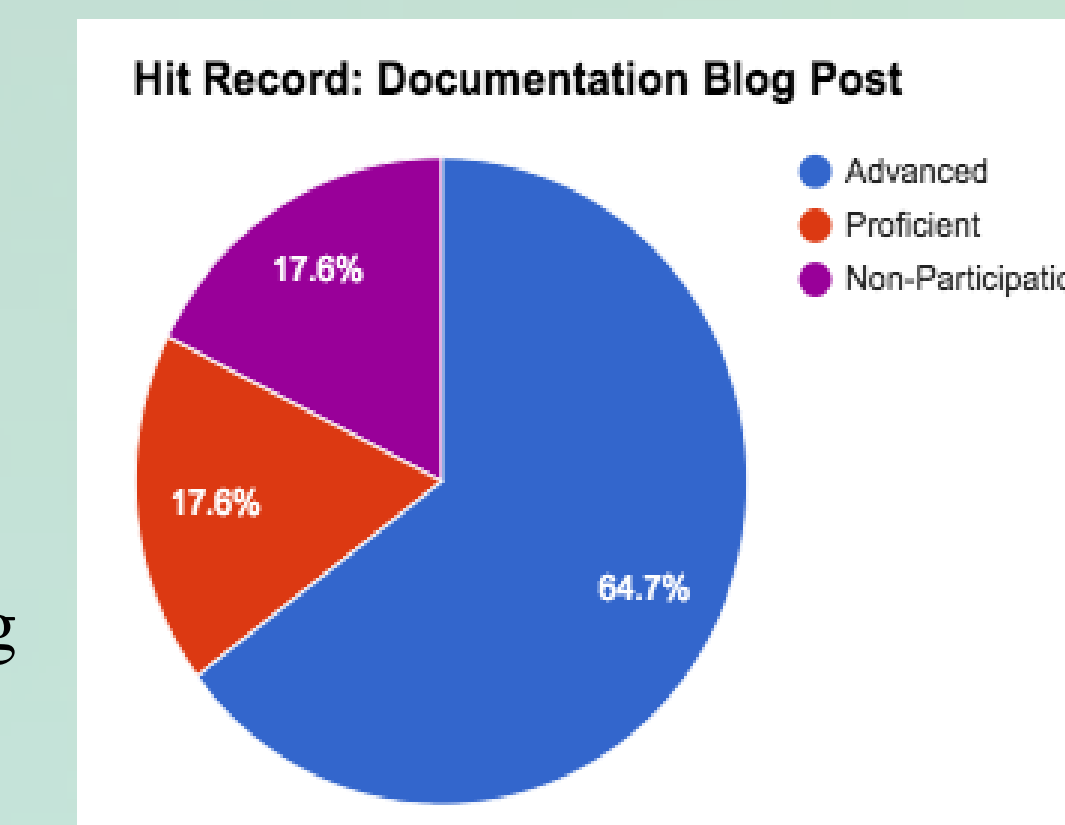
The reception of the new blogging format has been very warm from the students, and many students who already blog were extremely interested in having all their blogging, both educational and personal, on one website. In addition, some students echoed the sentiments of some of the staff, in that they didn't yet see the value of blogging, but seem willing to try, an exciting prospect.

The next steps to make portfolio successful was and continued to be to help them apply many of the models from the Innovative Learning program, such as how to use visual design to increase learning and ease of use, the SITE and Situation/Gap/Help models to understand one's audience, Clark's Model (1998) for teaching concepts and procedures, as well as understanding the Creative Brainset to help further the learning in our online community.

Data

First Semester 2016-17

- 95% of student body (408) have created a blog
- 9th grade blog assignments: 75% participation
- 10-12th blog assignments: 89% participation
- 9th grade classes: 50% college ready writing
- 11-12th grade class: 82.3% college ready writing



Results

Out of 408 students at New Technology High School, the student body has moved from 19% of students creating traditional brochure portfolios to 95% of all students actively blogging as a part of their everyday learning. Students are writing blogs that document, teach and show reflection of learning in all classes, Math, Science, Art, History and Language Arts.

Blog posts are categorized according to the School Wide Learning Outcomes at New Tech. There is now scaffolding in place to make sure that those who still do not have a blog created will get extra support to do so in the coming months through our Advisory class. There are also strategies in place to continuing to teach what an effective blog looks like, as well as time to work on concepts during Advisory.

One student's post was retweeted by an administrator at Vintage High, which then allowed for 300 views of her blog post in one day. It gained exposure for both the student and the school. Another student wrote a post about a certain technical tool on Adobe Illustrator during class. The teacher Facebooked the post and after reading it, a professional in that field left an encouraging comment for the student.

Within the walls of the school, students have shared blog posts on how to get along with teammates, how to create great copy for blogs, how to use technical tools, what their learning process taught them and how others can benefit. These blog links are featured regularly in the weekly school bulletin. Teachers are sharing links to certain blogs that address need-to-knows and the school has expanded our sources for new learning material at New Tech, taking greater advantage of the "experts in the room" and including students in that group as experts in their own right.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Touro University for providing a great program for learning about Innovative Learning.

Equally, I would not have been able to attend the program without the financial support of both NapaLearns through their grant program and The Napa Valley Retired Educators Association Scholarship Award.



NAPA VALLEY
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

NapaLearns
Partnering for Innovation and Success

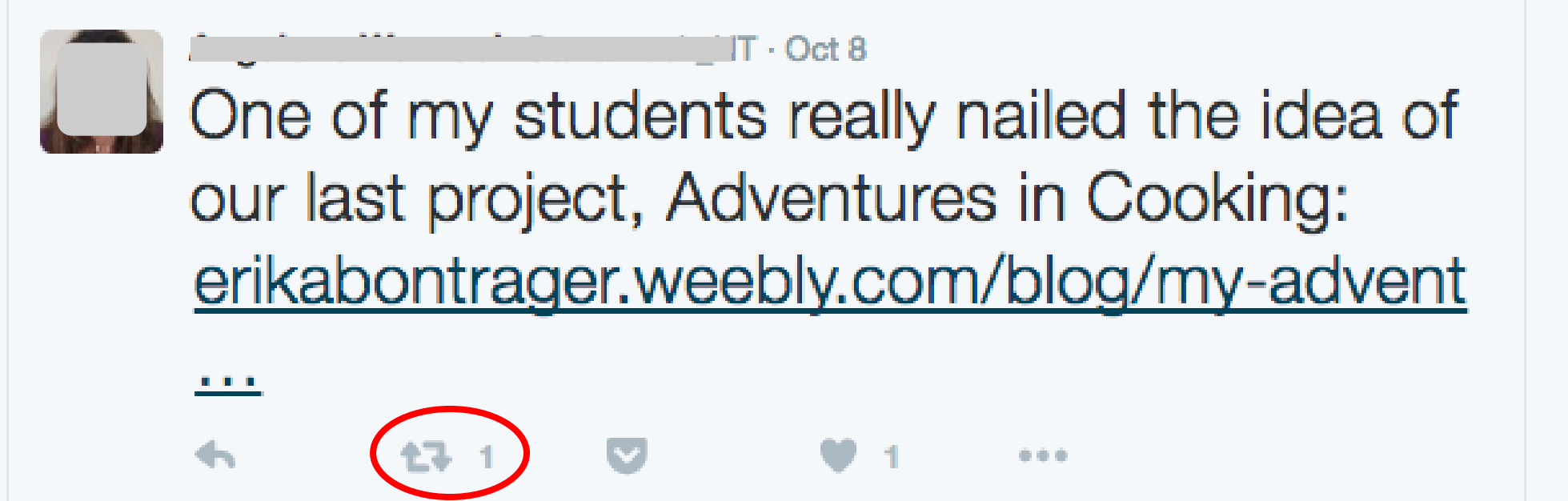
Conclusions

According to a study by Apple (2006) about learning in the 21st century, most students expect to learn in an environment that mirrors their lives and their futures. Looking at current hiring and workforce practices shows that portfolios and blogs are required for most jobs interviews. Creating blog portfolios at New Tech High is in direct alignment with preparing students for their future as a means of highlighting strengths as well as growth over time.

This year so far, students are blogging more frequently, having written, on average, 6-8 blogs since the beginning of the year. A trend in student work shows that students do not understand yet, about how to apply visual thinking to their posts, and are in the process of learning about how to better use procedural writing to teach others what they know.

It is not surprising that students are quite successful in using blog posts to reflect, as this is a skill that has been practiced since the beginning of New Tech as a school. It is, however, an ongoing task to get students to understand that blogging is not to be done just for the benefit of the teacher, but also for a broader readership outside of their classroom.

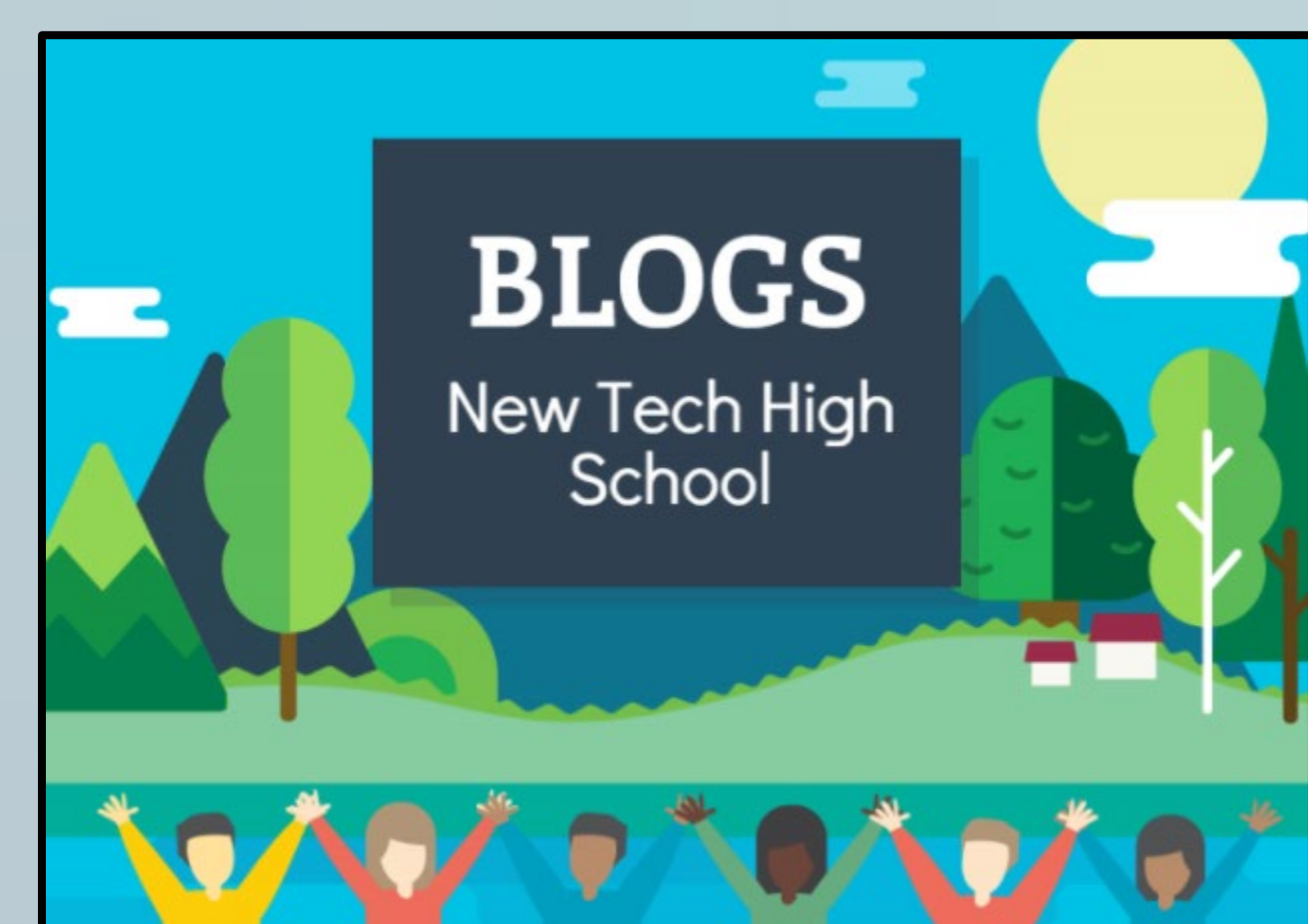
Next steps will be to continue introducing design concepts and how to write to a specific audience to 10th-12th grade students, work particularly with 9th grade teachers to scaffold blogging to increase participation, explore video blogging to help ELL and students with special needs.



I personally struggled with breaking down the ingredients within my food product to the elemental form. I struggled with this because, finding information about what is in specific food ingredients took a little bit of digging, and research to find. I think this also negatively reflects on the fact that, many people don't take the time to research what is really going into their bodies, and that is why there is less information about it on the internet. This correlates back to the "If you can't pronounce it, don't eat it" statement, because many people are too

Further information

To see more about the use of technology in the classroom
www.lisagottfried.weebly.com
To learn more about this capstone project:
www.learninginnovationlab.com
To learn about New Technology Portfolios
www.newtechhigh.org/students/student-portfolios



Literature Cited

- Johnson, R. (2016). Retrieved from <http://newtechhigh.org/admissions/why-choose-new-tech/>
- Waters, S. (2014, October 14). Retrieved from www.theedublogger.com/2014/10/14/the-state-of-educational-blogging-2014/
- Apple Computer, Inc., (2006) Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow - Today: Learning in the 21st Century
- Wallagher, M. (2015, September 8). Retrieved from www.emergingedtech.com/2015/09/the-state-of-blogging-in-the-classroom/