

A Platform for Partnership: A Technology Review of the Padlet sharing platform.

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Introduction:

Technology is in every aspect of modern life at present day and, to an extent, just navigating 21st century HE life already makes you '*tech savvy*', however when looking to technology to assist student-staff partnerships, colleagues need to take practice beyond Microsoft Office, Social Media and Photoshop. During a student-staff partnership research project, a student and Higher Education professional used the online platform Padlet as a means for collaboration for a research project, on a mutual platform, to possibly replicate Healy's principals of partnership such as; inclusivity, reciprocity, trust, and community (Healy et al 2014). Padlet has seen a large up-take by lecturers in HE as a platform to make debates accessible to a whole class or facilitate a seminar or open call for questions in a large audience. This free product is often used in small sections of teaching sessions, within lectures to spark conversation, show differing opinions and engage students, however this review intends to explore and evaluate Padlet's other function. This paper will offer a review of the platform for student-staff partnership projects to inform future use to hopefully move towards Healy et al.'s attributes. Learning within collaborative online spaces is increasingly popular in education (Wheeler, 2009b, xiii) and Bound and Prosser famously state that '*learning does not occur in isolation, peers influence it*' (Bound and Prosser, 2002, 239), which is certainly more possible than ever before.

The use of technology in pedagogy is growing rapidly, with many claims for increasing impact of the processes and outcomes in Learning and Teaching (Bound and Prosser, 2002, 237). Technology itself will provide new opportunities for learning students will be able to access information, classes and courses from many sources in a distributed way (Reddy, Goodman, 2001, 17). Padlet follows the literature as an example platform which offers a dramatic growth in capacity for the knowledge process in daily life, with a mobile learning environment in your pocket gives you some degree of flexibility so that you could conceivably learning while you are on the move (Reddy and Goodman, 2001, 4). Simon states that we must use technology when, and only when, we can see how it will enable us to do our educational job better (Simon, 2001, 63), which will be explored in this paper.

Padlet Summary:

Padlet is a piece of 'Social Software' similar to blogs (collaborative content sharing and editing), social bookmarks, discussion forums (Cole, 2009, 141) and social network pages. Padlet can be used to share knowledge, as 'user generated content' (Wheeler, 2009a, 5), which made the researchers keen to evaluate this form of knowledge repository similar to TEL 'classic' of a Wiki (Wheeler, 2009a, 5). The word 'wiki' was coined by Ward Cunningham and comes from the Hawaiian phrase 'wiki-wiki', which is translated as 'to hurry up' (Wheeler, 2009a, 5), associated with fast information which does not involve waiting months for publication. Wikis are viewed as fantastic 'idea dumps' or repository for later use (Wheeler,

2009, 4), enabling participants to work collaboratively to generate, mix, edit and synthesize subject specific knowledge within a shared and openly accessible digital space (Wheeler, 2009a). Though many Wikis in literature are written forums (Bonk, 2004), the team have discovered that Padlet is a visual form of Wiki as it follows the same principles, which are useful for creating a mutual platform for student-staff partnership research.

Owen et al. refer to 'The Wisdom Crowd' is greater than that of the individual, and the group gains ownership through such group activities (Owen, Grant, Sayers, Facer, 2006). Structures like Padlet for group work online have been referred to as 'Architecture of Participating' (O'Reilly, 2004, 268). New content can be created and used in partnership with others (Cole, 2009, 141), with hopefully Padlet offering a 'system that allows one or more people to build up a corpus of knowledge in a set of interlinked web pages, using a process of creating and editing' (Franklin and Van Harmelen, 2007, 5). The team used Padlet as a forum for a partnership project in a similar fashion to Dropbox, over our eight month project, for both stakeholders to visually access our information and create an information board. This follows Padlet's website which markets the app as the platform which is '*Perfecting the art of collaboration*' (Padlet, 2016) and also benefits own interests as a visual learners/planners. This paper wanted to investigate whether Padlet falls under Tonkin's third category of Wiki/TEL use; as a collaborative writing tool, which can be used by a team for a joint research such as a group project, essay or presentations (Tonkin, 2005). The student-staff partnership research project was investigating 'Which types of student engagement lead to a 'Sense of Belonging', and to what extent in students at the University of Winchester?' (Findings available at Humphrey and Lowe, 2017), working in partnership as part of the wider Winchester Student Fellows Scheme (Sims et al. 2014).

Research Findings – Interviews of Participants:

The student-staff partnership were actively engaged in reflecting on questions asked in the evaluation survey to explore whether the Student Fellow Partner and the Staff Partner found Padlet as a worthy forum for collaboration. The project was a form of cooperative learning situated within the social constructivist paradigm, with two individuals working on project and arguably a problem, in a team with both personal and team accountability for conceptual understandings (Cole, 2009, 142). The questions were asked by an external Research Officer to the student-staff partnership.

Q1: What do you think are the challenges you found to group work in Higher Education online?

The Staff Partner referred to issues surrounding group expectations, the practicalities of getting people together in a room when some members are not always on campus. The Staff Partner outlined that they have witnessed students/staff using TEL platforms for collaboration, however challenges come online with surrounding expectations, effort and output, with there being no pressure to contribute when the members are not in the room together. The Student Fellow outlined that many online platforms are that there is a difference between working in dynamic forums and working with static data, as tools either do one or the other (Padlet, being for static data predominantly).

Q2: What were the features that made you want to use Padlet on your research project?

As expected the Staff Partner was attracted the visual, '*pin-board*' feature of Padlet. Both expressed Padlet being a good source for sharing ideas, sharing resources and for planning seamlessly in a mutual space for collaboration.

Q3: What did you think were the positive features of using something like Padlet for group work?

Both participants expressed how Padlet was easy to share things, '*seamlessly*', as a good way of '*collecting stuff together*'. The Staff Partner also expressed how you could continuously add things without having to press save, which was engaging and even described the process as '*enjoyable*'.

Q4: What do you think were the limitations for using Padlet for group work?

Both interviewees expressed the limitations surrounding editing documents (Word, Excel) when the project came to dissemination. The Student Fellow used the term '*dynamic data*' where the team wished to edit documents for the purpose of writing up the research as an article / report. Both team members expressed how they moved to Google Docs as a co-creation document service is available there, whereas on Padlet, this was not available and documents would have to be downloaded, edited and reloaded. This was viewed as a '*time consuming process*'.

Q5: What other online platforms have you used for group work instead of Padlet and why?

Both participants spoke about moving away from Padlet to use Google Docs. Also in these answers, the Staff Partner discussed the benefits of using Outlook to '*transfer big documents to each other*' such as spreadsheets. The Student Fellow further elaborated on the benefits of Google Docs allowing each team member to see each other's edits, write comments and make changes easily

Q6: Do you feel that the alternative platforms you've mentioned matched the positive features of Padlet?

The Staff Partner was very positive about the features of Padlet and stated that '*none of the other platforms offer*' the visual and engaging aspects for group work. The Staff Partner also stated that they thought '*Drop Box is great for sharing large amounts of content and Outlook has its benefits for just quickly pinging across documents*' although Padlet still holds a unique place as a 'picture board' which is '*really cool and a great for a visual learner to just bring ideas together in that kind of scruffy 'starting the research off' time.*' The Student Fellow also stated that they thought the platforms discussed were each '*completely different, with both positives and negatives*'. The Student Fellow stated that all of these platforms are '*good*' because you can access them wherever you are.

Q7: What improvements do you think Padlet needs in order for it to be used for class based group projects?

Both the participants was very keen to see Padlet incorporate; the '*dynamic data*' / '*in-browser editing*' abilities of Google Docs to allow Word Document editing within the platform without downloading, a notification service of changes like Outlook, and '*folder*' functions for filing items like Drop Box / Windows Documents. The Student Fellow actually stated that Padlet

would be better than Google Docs if they took on these changes, as the visual 'static' side of Padlet is not matched by Google Docs.

Conclusion:

This review aimed to investigate and evaluate Padlet as a platform for collaboration in Higher Education. As learning, collaboration and general life moves more online, the team were interested to look at an alternative platform to the mainstream Google Docs, to investigate an alternative collaborative platform and app for student-staff partnership. From the above, the team recommend that Padlet is a worthy application for partnerships to use at the 'idea gathering' stage of a project. The brief evaluation has suggested that Padlet is also useful for sharing ideas and 'bombarding' resources into a shared space, much like a Wiki as outlined in my literature review. Also, for visual learners, Padlet offers a 'pin board' style platform to review content and ideas, where a list on a word document or set of files on Drop Box would not compare in the same visual, colourful way. However, as outlined by the interviews, Padlet does not offer the space for co-writing 'dynamic' resources, which led the team to move to Google Docs when writing up the research project. Although this was a limitation of Padlet, the partnership both valued Padlet for the start of the project when bringing ideas together, especially at the early stages of a project.

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