SOCIAL ANNOTATION TOOLS: READINGS AND RESOURCES

What is social annotation (SA)?

"SA technology is an online social bookmarking tool that allows annotating (adding comments, highlights, sticky notes, etc.) of an electronic resource and supports easy online information sharing" (Novak et al., 2012, p. 40).

Perusall is an example of a social annotation tool that enables comments to be embedded next to a particular passage of a PDF or video and viewable to others to add or respond to.

What impact can social annotation tools have on supporting student learning?

Evidence exists to the effect that students perceive a benefit to their learning.

> Students were asked to reflect on Perusall as both a close reading tool and a way of interacting with peers during the reading process. They were asked to consider both the technology itself (form and functionality) and the learning goals associated with the digital annotation process (fostering community and collaboration, ensuring close reading and analysis, providing a digital resource for subsequent course assignments). Students were given one open-ended text box in which to respond. (Walker, 2019, p. 241)

Representative selections from those student narrative responses:

> "Perusall was a good platform to use, and I like that it created a community for us to gather ideas. It was also a nice way to collect all of our readings and keep them in one place" (Walker, 2019, p. 243).

> It was really helpful to see other students' thoughts about the readings (that you wouldn't get to see if you had simply been reading the text alone). It was also nice to make sure that you weren't thinking completely off track and have the opportunity to have questions answered, whether it be by the instructor or other students. Sometimes reading online can be a little tricky because it's easy to lose focus, but keeping the annotations helps with that aspect too. (Walker, 2019, p. 244)

From a blog post about a McGill implementation of Perusall, a student stated:

> "Perusall has enabled me to learn more efficiently with my peers and I would like to keep on using such an easy-to-use learning platform" (Lenk et al., 2017).

Evidence exists to the effect that SA can result in better performance on assessments of learning.

> "The results of this study indicate that the SA tool Perusall contributes to deep learning and that students who perform the annotation assignments as required obtain significantly higher examination marks" (Suhre et al., 2019, p. 961).

What are recommended practices for implementation?

- Explain to students why you have chosen to use SA and what they should expect to get from participating in SA (Zhu et al., 2020).
- Give students an opportunity at the start of the course to become familiar with the SA tool you have selected and direct them to relevant resource material (Novak et al., 2012).
- Consider what your level of involvement will be: you might provide students with tutorials just to get them started or ongoing support throughout the annotation activities (Zhu et al., 2020).
- Choose material that lends itself to conversation and aligns with course learning outcomes (Suhre et al., 2019).
- To support interaction and discussion, consider forming small groups for SA (Novak et al., 2012; Suhre et al., 2019).

What practical resources are available to help with implementation?

Online Curation and Social Annotation, Vanier College
- Perusall – Overview and rating: http://collab.vanierpsi.profweb.ca/perusall/
- Social Annotation, including Tips on Using Perusall: https://technoped.netboard.me/ocsa/?tab=62916
- Teaching SA: https://technoped.netboard.me/ocsa/?tab=82158

Perusall information for instructors and students: https://support.perusall.com/hc/en-us

Wondering how to have Perusall added to myCourses?

See McGill's IT KB article on External Learning Tools integrated with myCourses: https://mcgill.service-now.com/itportal?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0011339

References

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