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Getting the Picture: Engaging Student Learning Using Pinterest

Jo Koster
Winthrop University, kosterj@winthrop.edu

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Getting the Picture: Engaging Student Learning Using Pinterest
Instructional Problem

• We used to ask students to bring magazines, newspapers, pictures, physical objects to class
• Most of them now access information digitally
• In class, takes too much time to have each student log in, pull something up on the screen, discuss, and then it disappears
• Is there a way to harness internet in a way to get them to collect ideas and images, reflect on what they compile collectively, and then analyze the corpus?
Potential Answer

- Digital curation
- Encourage student participation, investigation
- Allow examples that can be studied, analyzed, reflected upon
- Allows all students to participate
- But.....
  - Has to be easy to use, accessible, flexible
What is Pinterest?

- A curatorial site
- An online scrapbook
- “The world’s largest set of objects that people care about”
- “A database of intentions”
Pinterest is growing exponentially

- 100 million active users as of 9/18/15
- 85% of users are female
- 28% of online US adults use Pinterest
- 45% of all users are from outside the US
- 67% of users are under 40
- As of January 2015, **50 billion pins across 1 billion boards**
Collections of Related Ideas: “Boards”

- People have created more than 130 million boards categorized as Home Decor that represent rooms people have or want to create.
- People have created more than 180 million boards related to Food/Drink. Some of these are dinners that people will cook next week. Some are next year’s holiday dinner.
- There are nearly 300 million boards about fashion.
- There are more than 30 million education boards created by teachers and parents helping students learn in a more creative way.
https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=superbowl%20snacks%20super%20bowl&rs=typed&term_meta%5B%5D=superbowl%7Ctyped&term_meta%5B%5D=snacks%7Ctyped&term_meta%5B%5D=super%7Ctyped&term_meta%5B%5D=bowl%7Ctyped
Some of the Advantages of Pinterest

“Integral to saving things is discovering new things.”

“Pins aren’t just images. They are representations of things and we can make them rich and we can make them canonical and link back to the best source and we can attribute this properly to the creator.”

“Pinterest is not about your friends, it’s about yourself. It’s about the things you want in your life, the possibilities. ” —Evan Sharp
How do you pin?

- Make a free account on www.pinterest.com
- Follow other people’s boards or create one(s) yourself
- Find things* on the Internet or on your computer you want to “pin” to the board and pin them

*Must have an image to pin it
Uses in the undergraduate classroom

Students learn to work with a collection of data they have compiled. After looking over the corpus arranged by the class it was easy to see what comes to mind for most of us when we are asked to think about “what is medieval”. A majority of the pins attached to the corpus revolved around one of three things: Architecture, art, and clothing. Items such as women’s clothing, a knights armor, the castle, and paintings/stained glass really dominated our perception of the medieval age. The corpus shows that when asked about the medieval age our tendency is to jump to the cultural aspect of the era to describe what it means to us. It is not all that surprising though because the cultural aspects are the ones that stand out the most. They are the easiest to envision and the simplest to get a point across when asked the question “What is Medieval.” They are well represented through visual sources and modern pop cultural focuses heavily on them in movies and shows.

That's not to say other aspects were avoided by the class. The idea of the plague showed up a few times with maps depicting its area of effect as well as the outfit wore by the doctors of the time dealing with the plague. Military style was another topic of interest for the group as the corpus has multiple images of weapons, ships, and knights ready for battle. Religion was touched on by a few of the pin, mostly depicted through pins of the art and architecture (cathedrals). The corpus contains multiple aspects of what medieval has come to mean to us, but it does lean more towards the cultural side as far as the number of pins that were focused on it.
Students can analyze a corpus and connect to class readings.

“Looking through the Pinterest board I see a lot of emphasis on art from heraldry to illuminated manuscripts to architecture. There are some examples of weaponry and armor, which is arguably an art to create such pieces. I see images from *Game of Thrones*. I believe that there is a cohesive assumption about what Medieval is. It is very specific, but I fear that it is very simplified, and not all as close to true as we all believe. Marcus Bull uses Egypt as an example of the simplification of a large expanse of time into a small collection of jewelry, monuments, and writings.”
“Our corpus encompassed large ideals of the medieval time period. We covered the diverse artistry they had which stretched from stained glass with scenes from the bible to paintings about everyday life. There were also many posts about the clothes and writings. These were drastically diverse and showed just how different the medieval culture is from our culture today.

However, the corpus was mainly compiled of pins depicting war in the middle ages. There were posts of the many different types of armor and different types of weapons that were used. There were also many posts about the crusades and how the people fighting would dress. This caused the corpus to revolve around one thing and this led to show why there are so many pop culture references on our corpus about medieval fighting. There did not seem to be any real stray opinions of what people think the medieval culture is. Many people posted the same thing as others posted. This was a good thing because it helped show just how diverse the medieval culture was.”
“I think today we still interpret cathedrals much the same way as they were interpreted centuries ago. These cathedrals still carry a religious sense for many people and are seen as sacred and are revered. People gather at ancient cathedrals so they can experience a renewal of their faith and to stand in awe at God’s glory. However, I think castles are interpreted differently from what they were back during the Middle Ages. Nowadays I think people just see castles as really pretty structures. During the medieval period castles were built of course to house the monarchs, but they could also double as fortresses for protection, so people could shield themselves from their enemies. But in today’s time no one goes and hides in a castle to protect themselves from their enemies. Bojnice Castle in Slovakia is a popular site for filming fantasy and fairy-tale movies, and it hosts the most popular museum in the country. Many castles are popular tourist attractions, so I think the view concerning castles have definitely changed since the Middle Ages.”
“Castles and cathedrals were essential to life in the middle ages. Castles were erected to protect the masses against outside forces. These imposing structures were the center of life for hundreds of years, and without them, people would have to fend for themselves. And then there are cathedrals, built to be awe-inspiring houses of God. These structures were built to inspire, teach, and comfort all who pass through the doors. Without these structures in the medieval world, the world today might be a very different place.

Today, we can see many remaining influences today in our modern buildings. Just looking out the window in Owens, we can see many medieval influences. The towers, spires, fixtures on the Withers building remind me of medieval cathedrals. Even Tillman Hall has towers that is reminiscent of a medieval cathedral. Also, on the Pinterest board, I noticed an Episcopal church pinned by Matthew that reminded me of a castle with its big tower and squared off details along the roof. I think many architects choose to model their buildings after medieval icons because they want to elicit the same feelings medieval builders put into their structures. I think the ones that do really make people feel the awe when they walk into the building just like a medieval person would have hundreds of years ago.

Even though many of the old medieval buildings are no longer used and practical, we still many influences in our modern buildings. There is a fascination with the medieval word, and we want to show that love in our modern buildings. There is also that need to elicit the same intense feelings that medieval builders were able to accomplish with the primitive technology at their disposal. I think that might be the ultimate goal here, and in many cases, it is accomplished with a sense of nostalgia.”
Boards for graduate student assignments

Students Engage with Each Other....

The article that Laurie pinned about linguistic errors is a really good example of how we judge people for bad grammar. The title of the article embodies the amount of judgment we put on them for making mistakes that we all have probably made at some point. We just caught them before we wrote them down.

Another good example of that judgment is all of the pins on how to avoid grammar errors. Elizabeth pinned a comic on who versus whom, and Skyler pinned one about how to avoid the top ten grammar errors. Even with all of the jokes about the grammar police/nazis just emphasize how much pressure we put on people to have good grammar--even if it is just to avoid getting called out for having bad grammar.

But it also goes beyond grammar. We also call people out for word choice. Laurie posted a very famous scene from Dead Poets Society where Mr. Keating is talking about the reason for language, and how we should avoid using certain words because they are weak words, and we should find a stronger word to replace a "very" phrase.

The other interesting thing that I noticed is how many pins were about how difficult English is as a language. Emily pinned two articles about this. The first is the "ghoti' pronounced as 'fish' " joke. The second is titled "Why English is Hard to Learn." Even the fact that we have such a thing as linguistic anxiety indicates that English is a difficult language. But Skyler pinned an interesting argument against the difficulty of English (or, perhaps, supporting, depending on how you look at it) about how there is no correct English. Dr. Jones even says that grammar rules are completely made up. There is no rhyme or reason behind why an adjective describes a noun, or why prepositional phrases must have a preposition followed by an article and a noun. Language is literally anything we make it, and we prove that with how rapidly the language changes.
...and with Important Issues

There were some very solid, factual explorations of language in America such as Callie’s post "Americans Speak English Totally Different from Each Other..." or Michelle's pin containing information on language use in America. These were very interesting to me, because I find the variance in dialect to be cool, especially when there are individuals screaming for a universal American English to be the only language of the people. These were, somewhat repulsively, represented in some of my classmate’s pins, including the one addressing "Spanish Speakers", but more sneakily and malevolently embedded in the discussion of English Only Movements and Monolingual Classrooms (credit to Ivey and Keri).

While the politics behind these movements are fickle and corrupt, there are students in the classrooms and citizens in the workplace who are being told they are inferior or wrong, however indirectly. A great deal of these posts centered around English Language Learners of Hispanic descent (likely because illegal immigration is a buzzword in the upcoming election), but just as heavily (if not more so) impacted are African Americans who have a distinct, grammatical dialect in AAVE that is constantly nagged and schoolmastered out of them in schools. The racism embedded in these movements and in elevating one dialect over another was exposed through posts such as Keri’s post about Americans speaking so differently (I really liked that one, obviously) or the cartoon that Ivey pinned contrasting responses to a French individual struggling with the language and an Indian individual (obviously, the individual of color was treated with more disdain).

The racism and classism in linguistic politics that is exposed through our corpus of data is astonishing - not that my classmates are white supremacists, I recognize that they were only finding things online that were pertinent to our discussion. There were pins expressing racist sentiment that I hear at family gatherings every year, there were pins that were less distressing that drew attention to the absence of one "American" dialect, and there were pins that showed an extreme xenophobia in our lawmakers. I’m glad that the English/language arts teachers of tomorrow (from Winthrop, at least) look at things like this and will go into the school system with a better sense of understanding for their students who may not speak "standard" English. They may not be able to change the policies, but they will at least be able to help the students without as cruel a judgement as their fearmongering school boards.
Students adopt Pinterest

- https://www.pinterest.com/whatsjessdoing/medi eval-leisure/
And the Impulse Can Grow....

How Do You Do This?

Teacher...
- Set up a board
- Invite students to “follow” the board
- Invite collaborators
- Set tasks
  - Double deadlines

Students...
- Create Pinterest accounts
- Follow the class board
- Accept collaboration invitations
- Perform tasks
  - Add pins
  - Analyze data
Today’s links

• Pinterest site for the conference: https://www.pinterest.com/drkoster/teaching-and-learning-ideas/

• My demonstration website: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/116108496621218604/