# Using Pinterest for Learning

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*Abstract: This article shows how the social bookmarking tool Pinterest can be used to motivate students to learn, both as a self-access learning tool and as an in-class activity, giving examples from my teaching work whilst at Southampton Solent University. Following the use of Pinterest on the units I was teaching on, I carried out some focus groups to obtain student feedback. Overall, the response was positive, with students finding Pinterest 'inspiring' and 'informative'*

*Keywords: Pinterest, social bookmarking, student engagement, accessibility, employability*

*Apstrakt: Ovaj članak pokazuje kako alatka za društveno obeležavanje - Pinterest – može da se upotrebi za motivisanje studenata; kao alatka za učenje kojoj studenti mogu sami da pristupe, i kao alatka koju mogu da koriste za aktivnosti na časovima. Primeri su uzeti iz moje prakse, dok sam predavala na Southempton Solent Univerzitetu. Koristeći Pinterest za neke oblasti koje sam predavala, imala sam nekoliko fokus grupa, kako bih mogla da dobijem povratnu informaciju od studenata. Sve u svemu, njihova povratna informacija je bila pozitivna; studenti smatraju da je Pinterest informativan i inspirativan.*

*Ključne reči: Pinterest, društveno obeležavanje, angažovanje đaka, dostupnost, zapošljivost*

### 1. Introduction

A brief overview of Pinterest is provided, giving a background of the tool as a social bookmarking site for learning, before looking at its benefits in increasing student engagement, enhancing accessibility and developing employability skills. The article then suggests ways in which Pinterest can be used both inside and outside the classroom and includes a practical step-by-step guide, so that you can easily start using Pinterest as an educational practitioner.

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### 2. What is Pinterest?

Pinterest is a social bookmarking site, which is defined as 'an emerging type of a Web service that helps users share, classify, and discover interesting resources' (Yanbe et al, 2007:107). It looks like an online pin board, with each 'pin' allowing you to save links to useful websites, providing direct hyperlinks to them, and having the capability of storing related information. It is also possible to curate pictures and other images such as infographics, though copyright issues need to be taken into consideration when doing this. You can group your links together by

theme using 'boards,' thus organising them in a suitable manner. As well as being able to share links and boards with others, it is possible to search your own links and find links from other 'pinners.' Due to this functionality, Pearce and Learmonth (2013:3) describe Pinterest as 'a contemporary digital version of creating a collage or scrapbook.' Pinterest was voted number 13 in the Top 100 Tools for Learning 2015 (Directory of Learning and Performance Tools and Services, 2016).

### 3. Why use Pinterest for learning?

Firstly, as a social media tool, Pinterest can increase engagement by 'involving students in active cognitive processing,' which is motivating for them (Rockinson-Szapkiw and Szapkiw, 2011:361). It is particularly helpful to generate discussion or to collaborate on creative group work both inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, Pinterest can be used to supplement the required reading list and to act as an enjoyable revision resource prior to examinations, as put forward by Pearce and Learmonth (2013:4), who set up pinboards to reflect each week of their introductory anthropology class.

Secondly, Pinterest can be used to increase accessibility. For example, Thornton (2012:165) analysed how 57 academic libraries in the United States were using Pinterest, and found that it can 'draw visitors to collections, resources, and digitised archival materials, and share information and knowledge,' thereby increasing the approachability of material. Hansen et al (2012:7) reported that Pinterest's pictorial aspect is particularly helpful for visual learners.

Thirdly, Pinterest can help to develop employability skills by enhancing information and digital literacies (Dudenhoffer, 2012:330) - through the application of information technology, students are working towards one of the key graduate employability skills identified by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2009:8). To give a personal example, my professional use of social media online has led to me being offered work at other institutions.

### 4. How can Pinterest be used in education?

As an educational practitioner, you could set up your own boards related to courses on which you teach, in order to signpost your students to additional reference material, as Pearce and Learmonth (2013:4) did. In my case, after creating some boards relating to my teaching, I then embedded the links to these boards on the Virtual Learning Environment, which allowed me to monitor which ones the students were using the most. I mainly

set up boards and monitored their use for my International Foundation Year students when I was teaching at Southampton Solent University.

These students were adult learners aged 18 and above, were between IELTS level 4.5 and 5.5 and found the Pinterest resources helpful in sourcing supplementary information and learning new vocabulary. The boards ranged from those focusing on language skills such as reading and writing to content-oriented ones such as UK political parties, the National Health Service and the monarchy. I found that some boards were worth inviting colleagues to collaborate on, particularly for those who were also teaching on the International Foundation Year, as this was useful for us to share ideas when planning lessons for different groups of students undertaking the same course.

During classes themselves, Pinterest can be used for various activities. For example, again with International Foundation Year students at Southampton Solent University, I encouraged students to work individually and in groups to create their own Pinterest boards linked to a specific unit or assessment-related project. In one case, students had to pretend that they were the Human Resources department of a company and prepare written job advertisements and descriptions for two roles that they needed to recruit to. During the research phase of this assessment, one group used Pinterest to save job advertisements related to the roles they wanted to hire, as well as bookmarking information from trustworthy sites such as Acas (the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) to assist them in their project. Another group were preparing to deliver presentations on political parties in the UK and they used Pinterest to collate information from the main political parties' websites as well as their representation in the media.

Due to the level of critical thinking required in a university setting, I always asked my students to ensure that they pinned reliable sites, thereby engaging research skills and demonstrating digital literacy abilities. Further, by following reliable pinners such as approved organisations or newspapers, students could use the links appearing in their news feed to find new vocabulary and then share these words with the rest of the class. Fortunately, I was able to book classes in IT rooms in advance to facilitate these lessons.

## 5. Reflection on using Pinterest for learning

During the academic year 2014 – 2015, whilst lecturing at Southampton Solent University, I carried out a series of focus

groups with my students and collated their feedback on using Pinterest. Some students were on the International Foundation Year (IELTS level 4.5 – 5.5), whilst others were international students undertaking a range of different degree programmes from business to creative subjects who had chosen an optional advanced English unit to complement their studies (IELTS level 5.5 and beyond).

For the students on the International Foundation Year, I had set up various Pinterest boards relating to the topics they were studying, and so the focus groups I carried out with them centred around how useful they had found these as a resource to aid their learning throughout the academic year. Some of the students had also chosen to use Pinterest to collaborate together on group work projects and so I asked how they had found this process. For these focus groups, the goal was to see if using Pinterest had motivated them in their learning. The word cloud below provides a summary of the feedback obtained:



(Enideo, 2016)

For the students taking advanced-level English units, I asked them to look at my Pinterest boards and to evaluate them, using the reflective template given below. For these focus groups, the goal was to obtain a more objective view of Pinterest as a tool, since I had not set up any specific boards for them to use as part of the advanced unit. These students echoed the sentiments of the International Foundation Year cohort, finding Pinterest inspiring and full of information. The advanced students also provided feedback on how the boards could be improved, such as by narrowing the focus of some of the boards to have fewer pins on to make them appear less visually confusing and by categorising or labelling the pins more successfully to optimize the search function.

## 6. What steps can I take to explore Pinterest as an educational practitioner?

If you feel confident enough, you can start with the ideas suggested above, but if not, the steps below give a basic introduction to using Pinterest.

## 6.1. Set up an account

- Sign up at https://www.pinterest.com/ using your email address or Facebook account.
- Follow 5 general topics you're interested in - it won't find really specific topics such as 'corpus linguistics' at this stage but you could follow 'education,' 'languages' or 'technology,' for example.
- Search for and follow universities, publishers, libraries, colleagues and so on to see what they're doing and to generate a news feed. For example, some suggestions include: University of Southampton, The English Language Centre, Brighton (ELC, Brighton), Europass, Education Support Partnership, Edudemic, Routledge Textbooks, Nik Peachey, Kamil Trzebiatowski etc.

## 6.2. Set up a board

- Choose a topic you're interested in and create a board.
- Find 5 related websites to 'pin' to the board.
- 'Send' the board to a friend or colleague who is using Pinterest

and browse each other's pins, adding comments if you wish.

## 6.3. Invite someone to collaborate on your board

- Create a shared board on a topic of your choice with a colleague who is using Pinterest – perhaps begin by finding 20 pins between you to add to it. For example, suggested themes could include: assessment, culture, e-learning, IATEFL etc.
- Discuss with your colleague: how do you envisage using Pinterest within your context? (both in and outside class); can you envisage any issues with using Pinterest?; what do you think is the ideal number of pins per board?; how often should someone 'declutter' work-related boards and test for broken links?

## 6.4. Reflect on your board

You may like to use the template below to help you to reflect. It could be done by yourself and then with a colleague, or given to students to use in class on their own and then with peers.

**Complete on your own:**

|  | What do you like about this board? |
|---|---|
|  | What do you dislike about this board? |
|  | How would you improve it? |

**Discuss with others:**

|  | If you were to evaluate this board on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 = completely useless and 10 = extremely useful, what number would you agree on for this board? |
|---|---|
|  | Describe the reason for your collaborative score. |
|  | What is the one most important thing that could be done to make this board more effective? |

## 7. Conclusion

This article first provided a background to Pinterest as a social bookmarking site for learning, before looking at its benefits in increasing student engagement, enhancing accessibility and developing employability skills. I then demonstrated how Pinterest can be used to motivate students to learn, both as a self-access learning tool and as an in-class activity, giving examples from my teaching work whilst at Southampton Solent University. Focus groups to obtain feedback determined that students' experience was mostly positive, with them finding Pinterest 'inspiring' and 'informative.' Finally, the article included a practical step-by-step guide to easily start using Pinterest as an educational practitioner.

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