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Tomorrow's Digital Scholar: Using Google Docs To Promote Collaboration In Secondary School English

Student Dissertation

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THU: Tomorrow's Digital Scholar: Using Google Docs To Promote Collaboration In Secondary School English (Jonathan Brown).

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Mr Jonathan G Brown

8 January 2018



Abstract

Tomorrow's Digital Scholar: Using Google Docs to promote Collaboration in Secondary School English

The advent of Web 2.0 technologies in recent years has prompted a shift in academic practices, the openness and networked participation afforded by such tools leading to the emergence of what has been dubbed 'the digital scholar' (Weller, 2011). Technologies such as social media, blogging platforms, and collaborative writing software have provided digital scholars with unprecedented access to synchronous collaboration and real-time feedback, with vast networks of peers facilitating a constant process of creating, sharing, commenting and revision (Yamamoto and Karaman, 2011). As Higher Education institutions begin to adopt such practices, and Web 2.0 tools are increasingly 'becoming popular in teaching and learning environments' (Brodahl and Hadjerrouit, 2011), notions of what it means to be a learner are in a state of transformation. Digital tools have the potential to support learning in ever more innovative ways, 'mark[ing] a step change in the ways in which learners can interact with and on the web' (Selwyn, 2008), and encouraging a pedagogy that is open, participatory, and collaborative. The educational landscape is evolving, shaped, in part, by the digital scholar.

This has implications for the Secondary School Teacher, who is expected to 'demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship' (Department for Education, 2011). As the definition of 'scholarship' changes to include the practices and pedagogies of digital scholarship, and more school-leavers than ever before are going on to study at university (UCAS, 2016), teachers have a responsibility to ensure that their learners – the digital scholars of tomorrow - are adequately prepared in the tools and practices used in Higher Education and beyond.

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Many teachers are keen to embrace this responsibility, and there is evidence from the UK (Penney, 2017) and beyond (Woodrich and Fan, 2017) that some secondary institutions are already making innovative use of Web 2.0 tools to further open and collaborative teaching methods. Despite this, there remain barriers to ensuring that tomorrow's digital scholars are adequately prepared, including school cultures that discourage risk, a lack of confidence with Web 2.0 technologies amongst staff, and the absence of a support network to exchange ideas and to share examples of best practice (Kirkland and Sutch, 2009).

The conference presentation will demonstrate how a short multimedia course is being designed to negotiate some of these barriers. Aimed at the Secondary English teacher, who is ideally placed to promote the creative and collaborative practices of digital scholarship, the online course uses the open-source Learning Management System, Canvas, to demonstrate how Google Docs can be used effectively in the classroom for collaborative writing. Providing not only a guide to using Google Docs to promote collaborative writing, but a virtual environment for colleagues to exchange innovative examples of best practice, the course will offer one of many possible ways in which Secondary practitioners can nurture the skills of tomorrow's digital scholar.

Word Count: 481

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Extra content

[Accessible Conference Poster](#)



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

14:51 on 8 January 2018

Follow the link here to browse my online Canvas Course - Fostering Collaborative Writing Using Google Docs:

<https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/1273679>



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

13:17 on 15 February 2018

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Links (0)

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[Richard Sharp](#)

12:22am 18 January 2018 (Edited 12:26am 18 January 2018) [Permalink](#)

Hi Jonathan,

You suggest that the digital scholars of tomorrow must develop the correct practices for their future.

Do you think this means that curriculum design must reflect a social learning pedagogy and have collaborative activities centrally-placed in this design - including making those practices compulsory or graded? Is there an equitable place, for instance, in a Secondary English collaborative learning environment for a reflective, solitary, student author? :)

The compulsory part of this question relates to the topic of my project :)



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

8:51am 18 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Richard,

That's a really good question, as I was very much that 'reflective, solitary, student author' when I was at school; I really couldn't see the point in group work, as I worked much better on my own! I think that the 15 year old me would have benefited from collaborative tasks being graded (they were already compulsory, or I wouldn't have done them!), providing an explicit incentive even when the long-term benefits weren't immediately clear.

The problem we have now, I feel, is that secondary school assessment is too much geared towards the individual student author, not taking into account the changing modes of working that have been accelerated by Web 2.0 technologies. For the most part, this is due to the traditional exam system that we still have, with nearly all coursework now replaced by terminal exams. There's little official recognition for collaborative work. Perhaps if social learning was made more compulsory and graded in school-based assessments, exam boards / government might begin to change examinations to reflect this?



[Steve Penney](#)

2:25pm 20 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi

In my use of google docs and google communities I have stayed away from visible assessment. The discussions I had with A level students involved showed that they wanted a mix of public and private feedback on their work. While they were keen to be directed to resources and to upload completed work they valued the one to one specific feedback from the teacher.

They are as I am and as you mention Jonathan very aware of the very formal assessment criteria that the examination boards work to.

I felt that this was their choice, and while they do comment on each others posts on the

community these are by agreement judgement free. There is not doubt though that they like the use of this technology and that it provides an almost endless set of resources for revision.



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

9:12pm 20 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Steve,

I think you're absolutely right, the notion of public feedback can be very off-putting for students! I'm looking at a very different use of Google Docs, though; rather than an individual sharing work with others for collaborative peer assessment, I'm suggesting that multiple students work together to create a single document as co-authors - which could then be assessed. This assessment wouldn't have to be shared beyond the authors, and could provide a single grade for the whole team - perhaps negating student anxiety as to their performance, as the grade is shared?



[Denise McDonough](#)

6:32pm 27 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

I really love the Google Docs accessibility and sharing potential to support creative learning. Perhaps Sway could be another collaboration option. I accidentally discovered it can be used free of charge and independently of o365.

In my project development, I thought about using the Mobile Study Tips Guide (in Sway) as an icebreaker before small group activity either in class or Flipped Classroom. The assignment could be creating a new set of Mobile apps and identifying accessibility features on the mobiles or topics could be chosen from the current curriculum which they vote on using clickers or MeeToo polling. A longer view could use the objects created for Genius day where they teach each other using these projects with planning as an additional life skill. It could create a buzz and sense of ownership and answer the "why bother" question we certainly had at that age.

What age group, 15? From personal experience, I would have found this very difficult as a teenage girl. Most of the boys would just let the girls do everything and get credit. The girls in my group felt a lot of peer pressure to "help", "to be nice" and sadly get dates (you are in the same high school with these kids 4 years). We resented it but just wanted to get on with it. Sadly the teacher didn't monitor better.

Don't have the reference to hand but I read a good suggestion which was to have single sex groups competing with each other to gently force participation.



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

10:14pm 27 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Thanks, Denise. I keep meaning to investigate Sway, as it does look rather pretty. Do you know if it has any collaborative features built in? I do love the idea of 'Genius Day' - I've got pupils to lead lessons as often as possible!

Yes, splitting groups into boys vs girls can be really effective. In fact, as you'll see in my cloud ['We are Borg!'](#), that's exactly what I did! The element of competition was fab, and

the boys responded especially well to this - although, in all honesty, it was the girls who absolutely smashed it!



[Claire Richardson](#)

3:29pm 4 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

This looks interesting, Jonathan. Definitely more engaging than the kind of activities we had when I was in high school- I won't say how long ago that was.

Do all participants need a google account to contribute?

I think with respect to assessment, it might be a possibility to have a mark for the document, which is the same for all members of the group but then a relatively high proportion of the mark for reflecting on the group project and the individual's role in the project. I think this approach to assessment is often taken for collaborative work within the OU.



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

4:42pm 5 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Thanks, Claire. *Technically* participants don't need a google account, as sharing can be enabled to allow anyone with the link to contribute; however, *practically* participants do need an account, as this gives them Google Drive, the ability to create and store their documents, and makes collaboration much easier.

I like your suggestion regarding assessment, and it runs along similar lines to my own thoughts. The problem, though, is that should practitioners, in this case English teachers, be assessing participation at all, when the curriculum and terminal exams - GCCEs or A Levels - assess only individual skills? I think that the exams SHOULD be changed to include more modern digital scholarly practices - but how to enact this change?



[Payungsak Kaenchan](#)

1:24am 7 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

I am also using Google Docs with my students, and I share a similar concern about assessment. I believe on Google Docs there are features to track participants' edits--which could be useful for a teacher to somehow assess students. However, from my practice, I usually use Google Docs on project-based tasks, for instance, a translation work on which students collaboratively translate a piece of work. Then they can compare their edits and come to mutual agreement of final edits. In terms of assessment, of course there is a score for participation, which actually assess how actively students participate and how constructive their suggestions, feedback and comment are. And there is also a holistic score for overall performance as a group. I devised a rubric with band scores for this type of project-based task.

I want to implement Google Classroom but I did not have a chance. Not sure if Google Docs in Google Classroom is different from the one I am using via a Gmail account.

[Richard Sharp](#)



10:23am 7 February 2018 (Edited 10:25am 7 February 2018) [Permalink](#)

Hi Payungsak and Jonathan and Claire,

Since you're talking about assessment of group work - i'll chip in (since it relates to my project) :-)

In Payungsak's description - why does the skill, or activity, of group translation need to be assessed and graded?

Could you have an excellent linguist who is less competent at group work, receiving a lesser qualification outcome than a fair speaker who is better at working in a team?

Even if you regard this as a life-skill or as a communication and employability skill, aren't you enforcing a learning practice ... and then assessing the practice?

You might say that you assess every individual input to the group work for its quality in order to fairly reward the individual - but, then you are really back to assessment of individual work - with the veneer of it being a product of participation, rather than simply being forced into that framework.

It's funny how people now rubbish the concept of "learning styles" as being unproven and out-of-date - but are quite happy to enforce a practice that amounts to the same thing- but in a one-size-fits-all fashion.

Learning styles at least is an attempt to tailor and support individuality (within broad types) - the enforcement of social learning practice (particularly when compulsory and graded) is a statement that everyone has, or should have, the same approach to learning.

(that's my view anyway - a minority view on this course I think - but it may be useful as a counterpoint to your own as part of a discussion) :-)



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

2:27pm 7 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Yungie,

That sounds like a pretty good balance of assessment to me, awarding individual and group contributions. Yes, Google Docs is the same in Google Classroom - but you get a whole extra interface that allows you to group students into 'classes,' set assignments, award grades, post in forums, etc. It's like a simplified, accessible VLE, and we used it at my last school. I think it's excellent, but unfortunately you can only use it if the educational institution signs up to it. Now I'm no longer at the school, I've lost access to all the courses I set up!

Jonathan

[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

2:37pm 7 February 2018 [Permalink](#)



Hi Richard,

Hmm, I guess it's about having a healthy balance, ensuring that all learners get to experience individual and collaborative learning styles? At the moment, the secondary curriculum seems too biased towards individual learning methods, and I feel it doesn't reflect the whole spectrum of ways in which people learn. I think it's the teacher's responsibility to ensure that pupils are familiar with learning and assessment through both approaches; some will gravitate to one approach or the other, but in a balanced curriculum, both are deemed important?

Jonathan



[Richard Sharp](#)

12:34am 8 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jonathan,

Dialling back on the negativity :) ... I agree with your sentiment, that you'd like your students to experience both individual and collaborative learning styles. I'm for anything that helps students to develop their learning skills and become more competent self-directed learners (including being able to use collaborative environments when they want or need to).

It's good inclusive practice to provide learning choices and multiple ways to engage. I'd just want these pathways to be well supported, and available, but optional. Or, when people gravitate to one method or the other (as you said) - that they are allowed to do so.

And I wonder if that there is a difference in the assessment of the two approaches.

The current focus of individual assessment seems to be on the individual's output (rather than their individual learning practice). But, when it comes to collaborative learning - I think that often it is the practice that is assessed, either directly by metrics of participation activity, or indirectly by being so rigidly enforced that there is an effect on the output of assessed work and therefore the grade.

But I suppose the difficulty is in finding a way to assess individual effort expended on a genuine participatory experience, in a way that you still assess an output and not the practice itself.



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

8:28am 8 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

'But, when it comes to collaborative learning - I think that often it is the practice that is assessed, either directly by metrics of participation activity, or indirectly by being so rigidly enforced that there is an effect on the output of assessed work and therefore the grade.'

I think you're spot on here, Richard. It too often seems that when collaboration is assessed, it's the effort or the act itself which is assessed, not the output or result - but it's the exact opposite with individual assessment. In theory, an individual could put in little effort, but still produce an effective piece of work and receive a high grade. I do feel we need consistent assessment that rewards output and effectiveness, regardless of whether this is achieved collaboratively or individually.



[Denise McDonough](#)

9:12pm 12 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Thank you for your contribution to my project and your recommendation about using Google docs more fully to engage my learners.

They provide a very accessible and responsive platform for collaboration. In combination with Sway or other visual tools students can have fun as well as learn technical skills by practicing spreadsheets, editing documents and creating multimedia.

All the best, Denise



[Denise McDonough](#)

6:15pm 13 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

....."legal aspects of supporting diagnosed anxiety sufferers, or to looking at how to promote confidence and participation in forums - did you decide which to go for? As the success of my online course hinges on collaboration and participation, I'm very interested in your findings."

I read your post on Claire's cloud and am interested hearing more detail from your context and strategies. I imagine if it is a challenge for us as adults, young students/teenagers might be especially reticent - so much peer pressure to conform and online bullying these days, being different/sharing an opinion could be quite difficult.

Thanks, Denise



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

6:28pm 13 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Funnily enough, as a Secondary school teacher I never had much problem in getting pupils to collaborate online. In terms of my online course, I'm far more worried about getting teachers to participate in the forums! I've seen a lot of resistance from colleagues in the past when it comes to online training. Partly, this may have been down to workload or to the perceived relevance (or lack!) of the training to their own practice. However, I've heard more than one teacher say something like 'Oh, I don't do forums,' and this may possibly stem from a lack of confidence. As a teacher, I could always say to a pupil 'you have to use the forum for your homework!' How do you do this to an adult?!



[Denise McDonough](#)

12:51pm 15 February 2018 (Edited 12:54pm 15 February 2018) [Permalink](#)

Brilliant presentation Jonathan, especially following Martin Weller - the original Digital

Scholar author :-) I especially love the google doc. element which addresses openness and collaboration as a tool - thanks for engaging me with it on my project. The tip about it working in schools (not filtered out) was a good one. The Canvas site is also very nice. I requested my own and now wished I could have used it for mine - my guide could be added as part of it.

I have had some inspiration on the collaboration assessment question. I agree it needs to be done to push users to do it. I think I would make them Pass/Fail. Clear guidance on substantive posting over and over and a private nudge every few weeks to those that post brief comments or not participating need to step up. I was one of those. I didn't see the value, it is too slow.

I resisted the forums, they seemed to old fashion being text based. I don't like that you can't wholesale subscribe with a click at the beginning. I always forget to click each one as it gets busy! I also want to reply from my email - why can't this be done? Will Canvas make it easier to be mobile friendly - not trapped in the VLE. I sit at a computer all day and want to study mobile. As this is the fastest growing market of hardware sales and supports users that cannot fund a computer, it needs attention. This is the reason for my project (not just whinging).



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

1:09pm 15 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Thanks Denise. I felt I waffled, and didn't say half of the things I wanted to say! I think that in some ways that's more difficult than presenting to a conventional audience, as you can't really see how people are reacting. A good experience, though.

I agree with you, that students do need pushing towards collaboration. I wouldn't have done it willingly when I was at school, and even last year when I began the MAODE, I was dismayed when I first saw how much it relied on forums and interaction! However, I've very much enjoyed the collaboration over the modules so far, and really do see it as integral to the course.

Like you, I'm also frustrated with the lack of mobile-friendliness with our forums. Replying via email would be much more convenient. Yes, the Canvas mobile apps are great - there are separate ones for course-designers and students, and a lot of thought has clearly gone into them.

All the best for your presentation on Saturday! Unfortunately I can't be there, as I'll be looking after my son all weekend while my wife's away on a school trip. However, I will be watching the recording, as I'm hoping to write about your project in my EMA! Are you all set yet?



[Mike Lyons](#)

3:02pm 15 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

I enjoyed your presentation immensely, and will watch it again. I agree with Denise that you followed Martin brilliantly.



[Richard Sharp](#)

6:30pm 15 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Good presentation Jonathan - good subject, well explained, and very natural and fluent presentation skills.

We discussed in forum yesterday about criteria, and Mike's suggestions about recognising the personality of the presenter and their ability to engage the audience - I think that you did well there.



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

8:28pm 15 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Thanks for your kind comments, Mike and Richard. Really nice to have your support today, even when you weren't presenting. Mike, I won't be able to catch yours live on Saturday, but will be listening to the recording. Richard - I'm hurrying my son to bed on Monday; I'll miss the keynote, but should be along after that!



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

10:15am 16 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jonathan

Well done on a great presentation! Here is a summary of the comments and questions you received following your presentation (including those you may have addressed verbally). Please respond in whatever way you choose.

Best wishes

Simon

- ▶ Really good to see this approach starting in schools. If it's not assessed, will students use it?
- ▶ Have you seen the Welsh Digital Competence framework? Might be something in that worth looking at: <http://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/digital-competence-framework/?lang=en>
- ▶ Worth looking at ways secondary school students already collaborate? EG through class Whatsapp groups where they inform each other about upcoming assessment dates etc
- ▶ [Students] do need preparation before university entry.
- ▶ I teach at Foundation level unis...and no, students quite often don't have the computer skills :(
- ▶ Students use of technology for education largely superficial and presentational, without support
- ▶ Even as a learning technologist within HE - the lack of digital literacy of academic staff can at times be challenging.



[Helen Dixon](#)

3:59pm 17 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jonathan,

Sorry I missed your presentation on Thursday - just getting caught up now! I agree that we need to encourage teachers to develop their own digital literacies if we are to help students develop these capabilities. I often hear teachers saying things like 'my students aren't interested in contributing to forums' etc. but suspect that this can be an attempt to hide the fact that the teacher does not have the confidence to use these tools. I think that online communication and collaboration skills need to be embedded fully in the curriculum as these are competencies that will be needed in the workplace.

Well done!



[Denise McDonough](#)

7:22pm 18 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi, it went so fast on Sat! Had mic issue so Simon asked Steve Penney (who was to follow me) if he minded starting so I could restart Adobe connect and log back in. Then I forgot to breathe! So at the end it was such a relief. Glad to help with EMA - use any quote from our other channels as needed.

I made a bulleted list for the EMA guidelines and will make a g-doc so we can get all the points clear please add your thoughts - the text based are so hard to crack! Will create a post with link in EMA FORUM



[Denise McDonough](#)

7:22pm 18 February 2018 (Edited 7:23pm 18 February 2018) [Permalink](#)

Duplicate



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

12:09pm 19 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Denise,

I know, the time just flies by! I'm sure it was fab, though, and sounded the right speed to everyone else! I'm sorry I couldn't attend live, but now that my son's back at school I'll be able to catch up soon with the recording :-)

Your EMA guidelines sounds like a great idea. I'll head over to the forums in a mo to check out the doc!

Thanks also for all your help so far. I've chosen you and Richard for the EMA review, as you've both given me lots of great feedback and ideas. I spent Friday making notes on you both!



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

12:11pm 19 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Thanks, Helen. I think you're right - we just can't take those skills for granted. Now we just need to convince the Education minister that they're as important as traditional literacies in today's workplace.



[Denise McDonough](#)

8:12pm 25 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jonathan,

I had a good look at your project website today in EMA research mode. I already admired it and found the design and Canvas interface fantastic, easy on the eyes. Last month I signed up for an account. I am not sure if this is why when I try to explore an Activity, clicking 'Next' it asks me to log into my Canvas Account and leaves your site. I could use tuition on G-Docs :-)) and only could see the first page.

On the Why Collaboration page, the link took me to my Google Docs files - not sure if that was intended or students would be in a school G-Environment and end up in the right directory.

I provide this feedback as one who would appreciate this type of critical review for my project. Thanks for the feedback so far. If you could User test with your teacher and student goggles on for me at some point (ideally for EMA) I'd love to know if the videos in my Guide are interesting because they are all different or annoying and if I should invest the time in making them all with my own narration, length and any other attributes you think useful. In my conference wrap-up I asked for this user testing via the links in the Guide or the email I created studyappsproject@gmail.com

Thanks for interacting on Twitter with me regarding Gdocs and additional resources I wanted to share with you. It is helpful to practice these activities with someone you know and has the same interest in exploring these resources. I was using my iPhone SE and the first time (the one that looked blank to you) had an attachment rather than a link.

Perhaps now I understand why the 'chat feature' is not available in our OU Moodle environment - although (I am told by a Moodle admin) it could be. By limiting IM within OU, I have found other networked channels which will help me develop my goal of Networked Practitioner.

As we also found in the various forums, OpenStudio and Cloudworks there were a lot of channels to track - however painfully slow response time. If you prefer a private channel please DM Tweet me [@d607](https://twitter.com/d607)

BW, Denise



[Anita Naoko Pilgrim](#)

9:14am 26 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

This paper (which is part of reading for the module EE814: Addressing Inequality and Difference in Educational Practice) might be of interest to you. The second case study describes an English teacher promoting collaborative work between her students, and how this helps her be more inclusive.

Comber, B. and Kamler, B. (2004) 'Getting out of Deficit: Pedagogies of reconnection', *Teaching Education*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 293–310.



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

9:49am 26 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

That's fantastic, thanks Anita! I'll definitely check that out. Hope everything's going ok, and do let me know if you need any feedback for the EMA.



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

9:50am 26 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Thanks Denise. I've replied in detail via your StudyApp email.



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

11:38am 26 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Many Congratulations Jonathan! Your presentation has been voted by delegates to be one of the most effective of the H818 Online Conference 2018 and you are officially one of our H818 Presentation Star Open Badge Winners! Please see how to Apply for your Badge here: <http://cloudworks.ac.uk/badge/view/33>

Well done!

Simon

H818 Conference Organiser



[Denise McDonough](#)

5:41pm 26 February 2018 (Edited 8:01pm 26 February 2018) [Permalink](#)

Congratulations Jonathan and well done! I have started the Canvas Mooc and it is great www.canvas.net if you haven't seen it. Yours looks pretty darn good already!

Thanks for the message - I have correcte and tested the studyappsproject@gmail.com address and it is now working correctly. Apologies!

Contribute to the discussion

Please [log in](#) to post a comment. [Register here](#) if you haven't signed up yet.