

The Challenge

I started using Talis Elevate in English Literature seminars in 2020 at a time when it was no longer possible to read and annotate physical copies of sources together because of COVID-19 lockdown measures. Before the pandemic, learners would often annotate hardcopies of primary sources during in-person seminars using question prompts. Through these collaborative reading activities, learners were able to explore one another's ideas and learned how to read for academic purposes by gaining feedback on their critical analysis from me, themselves, and their peers.



This in-person collaborative reading activity was not possible when we transitioned to online teaching, leading to several challenges that had implications for learning and inclusion. I noticed learners were not interacting with the reading as much as before and the seminar discussions were not as lively as they were pre-COVID, which in turn impacted the depth in which the readings were engaged with in the assessments. Many learners appeared to be less confident with the reading and sharing their interpretations during seminar discussions, which meant some voices were not included in the conversations.

For these reasons, I struggled to gauge the learners' understanding of the reading and whether there were any areas that would benefit from further teaching to support their learning. As the seminars were based on the set readings, I was eager to find solutions to these problems in collaboration with learners and colleagues.

The Solution

I started using Talis Elevate because it enabled learners and I to engage in the collaborative reading activities remotely. We primarily used Talis Elevate to read extracts of the primary texts during live online seminars. When used synchronously in seminars, learners were assigned into breakout room groups and tasked with annotating the source in response to question prompts. Learners were asked to assign themselves roles to ensure they understood their contribution and to support the success of the activity, e.g. one person per group would record their ideas by annotating the source using Talis Elevate, another person would ensure every member was able to contribute their ideas, and so on. Following the small group reading and annotation activity, we would all join back together in the main Teams room to discuss and develop the annotations as a whole group.

I continued to use Talis Elevate in this way when we moved to blended and in-person teaching but diversified the activities. For instance, I have also used it asynchronously with colleagues and postgraduate learners in Education to support their reading preparation for lecturers, seminars, and workshops.

The Results

Talis Elevate significantly increased learners' confidence to read for academic purposes by enabling them to develop and gain regular feedback on their knowledge and analytical skills in preparation for assessments. This impact is reflected in the feedback I have received from undergraduate and postgraduate learners, in which the tool is praised for enabling learners to engage in conversations by providing a space for them share their ideas in written form and providing them time to think through their ideas before the whole group discussions.

The ability for collaborative reading activities to engage learners in academic reading is further evidenced by the quantitative data captured in the analytics page for each module on Talis Elevate. For instance, one source generated 161 class comments over the course of the semester-long module; this source was the core text for the module, which learners read incrementally in preparation for each workshop. Many learners not only annotated the source but also responded to one another's comments, helping to build a learning community and encourage conversations beyond the workshops.

Finally, the collaborative annotation activities using Talis Elevate also helped me to reflect on my own approaches to teaching and enabled me to deepen my disciplinary knowledge through the process of engaging with the learners' annotations. Talis Elevate helped to create more inclusive and compassionate learning environments, within which we were all encouraged to learn from and respect one another's voices.

"Talis Elevate not only helps teachers to model academic reading strategies and other core practices, it also encourages learners to co-construct knowledge and makes reading more fun by encouraging them to engage actively with the sources."

Aimee Merrydew

The Solution

Having discussed Talis Elevate with colleagues across and beyond Keele, I am excited by the versatility of the collaborative reading techniques and tools and plan to expand my use of them in new contexts. In my current role as a university-wide learning developer, I am particularly eager to bring Talis Elevate into academic literacy workshops to encourage learners from different disciplines to explore and develop their academic practices together. For instance, I plan to use the tool as part of an editing and proofreading activity, whereby learners can work together to edit and proofread an assignment. I am also keen to explore how Talis Elevate can be used to support peer feedback on video presentations created by learners in preparation for the annual Keele Conference of Undergraduate Research, enabling learners to practise presenting and gaining feedback on their research.

We'd like to thank Aimee Merrydew for providing this case study on her use of Talis Elevate.

If you'd like to contribute a case study to this collection, please get in touch with our EdTech Success Consultant - matthew.weldon@talis.com