

The Challenge

We used Elevate for the first time because we had to completely rewrite all of the modules for switching to online teaching during lockdown. Interestingly, I hadn't looked at many of the tools that were available - tools like Padlet, Mentimeter, and Talis - when I was looking at what was available and would be useful for effective online teaching. That was what instigated it, rather than having noted a particular problem in our approach. Then, through using it, I saw what it brought, that then highlighted some shortcomings in our previous methodology.

Particularly with the first years, we know they need to be taught how to read, because critical reading is new to them and they were a little bit intimidated by it. We always did our very first reading in class, framing how to do it, and then we would get them to make notes and identify questions and then share those with the class and the group discussion. But with new students can find this intimidating, they often don't like sharing in that way. We use Talis as a way of being able to do this same exercise but online.

The Solution

We didn't add all of our resources to Elevate - instead, we added the core readings. The module is structured with a core reading every single week, which would be introduced with a lectorial, and then it would be opened up to a broader discussion. We used Elevate with all those core materials, which were mostly textual.

As well as making notes, I would go through resources beforehand and I would highlight what I thought were key passages, or if there were words or phrases which were particularly difficult, I would provide definitions. I would also ask questions all the way through the readings, to give students a bit more scaffolding and a bit more help.



Once I had done that, they would access the reading, and I would get them all to annotate and add additional notes, thoughts, comments and questions. That meant when I came in for the lecture, I could read through their annotations and I could tailor what I was presenting to some of their particular concerns. It helped me know how best to target the discussion, as different things can be taken out of readings, and I could see what their understanding or lack of understanding of the text was.

In subsequent years I spoke to students about what their preference was, and I actually retained the annotations and discussions from previous years. I talked to the students about whether they found that helpful or whether they found it was becoming too busy, and overwhelmingly they found it helpful to see this growing conversation around the text.

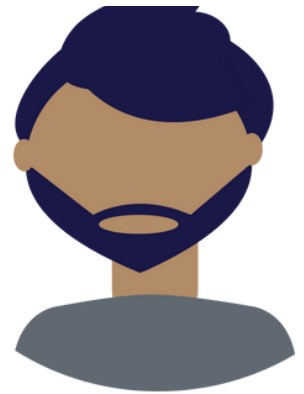
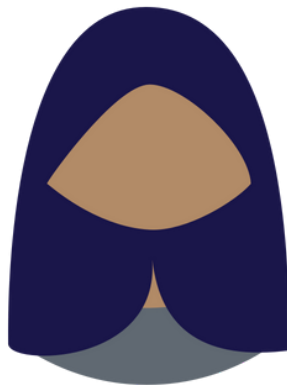
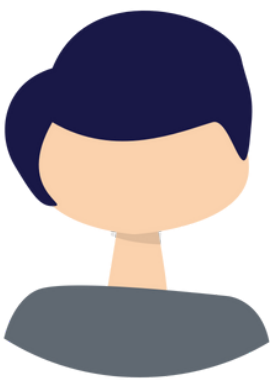
The Results



Immediately I realized that it had two massive benefits: the digital format is something that students naturally found in-keeping with ways that they engage with material already, and they preferred the social aspect. Having students be able to see each other's comments in real time, and that community way of working, it just immediately became clear to me that they found that much more comfortable. Also, sometimes people just find speaking up more difficult, and yet being able to make notes that we could all access and all see, people who were uncomfortable speaking out in sessions were still making a contribution. Then, we as the tutors could speak to what they've written if they were uncomfortable speaking for themselves; it's really kind of transformed the quality of that exercise, so we stuck with it.

I think it meant a little bit more work for us, but we were very willing to do it because we saw the value in it educationally. You'll still get certain stronger voices and personalities that will speak up and others that are reticent and don't make comments, but Talis gives students more options.

There's some possible questions or criticisms around the slightly “Big Brother” monitoring aspects of Talis Elevate as well, but if I ask students to do a reading and then ask if they’ve done the reading, invariably almost all of them will say yes, even though it's quite clear some of them haven't. But when it's on Elevate, of course I can see who's been on there for 2 minutes, so couldn't possibly have done the reading. That allowed me to impress on students that those who were engaging were overwhelmingly commenting on how much value they getting out of it, and I could make the point to them that it is a community based approach and the more people that engage in that, the more valuable it is for everybody.



The Future

We’re absolutely going to continue to use Elevate because the students have been very positive about how helpful they find it. Students can get quite siloed and reading and writing is something that they end up doing on their own. We try to get them to see that the whole point of being at university is that they are in a community and they should be reading each other's work and speaking with each other about their encounters with these new materials, even informally, to just help support each other. I think Talis just really highlights that by literally seeing them doing it together in real time.

I would also be interested in looking at other people’s best practice to see what others are doing, that maybe I'm not.

We'd like to thank Cavan McLaughlin for providing this case study on his 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