Collaborative Annotations: Developing Students' Critical Reading, Thinking, Writing, and Teamwork Skills

Ian Werkheiser
Department of Philosophy
Center for Collaboration and Ethics
ian.werkheiser@utrgv.edu
(Some of) My Problems

• Students being unprepared for discussion in class, cramming for tests
• Vicious Circle of Explanation
• Difficulties for some students in participation (group or class)
• Guessing about confusion when preparing lesson plan
• Students need more writing practice
• Students need more domain-specific reading practice
• Students need more practice sharing ideas
• Building a “Community of Learners” took a large portion of the semester
Collaborative Annotation

- Annotating texts – writing comments, critiques, definitions, summaries in the margins of a text
- Better understanding
- Better retention
Collaborative Annotation

- Collaborative Annotation – working as a group to annotate one text, and discuss with one-another in the margins.
- Help one-another learn about the reading
- Learn about one-another
- More engaging
Collaborative Annotation

- Can do it in-person
- Excellent Exercise. However, for me,
  - Too Slow
  - Doesn’t solve most of the problems
Collaborative Annotation

• Can be done online
  • Asynchronous
  • Doesn’t take up class time/can lead to preparedness before class
  • External and Internal rewards
  • More feedback possible
  • Various metrics and analysis are easier
  • Depends on access to computers, favoring those who own them at home and who feel comfortable using them
Perusall.com

- Developed at Harvard by professors for their own classes
- Free
- Can use textbooks, uploaded pdf’s, websites, etc.
- Easy to use as a website
- Lots of functionality
  - Confusion Report
  - Upvoting and tagging
  - Algorithmically generated grade suggestions
  - Linked with our LMS
- Drawbacks
  - Can’t view one student’s annotated text
Hypothes.is

- Developed at MIT by professors for their own classes
- Free and non-profit
- Can use uploaded pdf’s, websites, etc.
- Easy to use once you install a Chrome extension
- Lots of functionality
  - Can make private notes
  - Linked with our LMS
  - Notifies instructors about questions
- Drawbacks
  - Only automatically counts original posts
  - Can only link to publicly accessible websites/articles
Annotation Studio

• Developed at MIT by professors for their own classes
• Free and non-profit
• Can read any pdf you send students
• Complicated to install and use for students, quite complicated for instructor

• LOTS of functionality
  • Most of those previously mentioned for Hypothes.is
  • Changing and improving all the time

• Drawbacks
  • Requires a significant time investment to play around with it
Good Practices

- If you have a large class, split them into learning communities/reading groups
- Consider linking it with LMS (Blackboard)
- Model everything – how to create an account and join, what a good comment looks like, etc.
- No anonymous accounts
- Stay on top of grading and replying to the notes, especially at first
- If a student isn’t doing well, proactively ask them to come to your office to discuss it
- Give students an opportunity to print the documents (usually in settings, or on class LMS)
- Work with Accessibility Services, but has often been seen as an accommodation
- Encourage repeated readings and commenting
Reviews of Collaborative Annotation by UTRGV Students in an Intro to Philosophy Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What did you think of the online collaborative annotation of the texts? Were they helpful? Could I do something to make them more helpful in future classes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Have more video collaborative annotations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I think that the online collaborative annotations were helpful because whenever I wouldn’t understand a certain paragraph from the text, I can just ask a question on the annotations or ask someone to explain a little more.</td>
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<td>- I think the collaborative notes were useful because the notes people provided were very useful for getting a different perspective on the paper. When I was confused on what the author meant, I would look at the notes to see if someone understood and they were able to provide a simpler explanation and explain. I think it would be beneficial to ask students to bring in questions that they thought were difficult or needed more explaining on so that they can have a better understanding of what the philosopher meant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I think they were very helpful, if I didn’t understand the text or a certain paragraph and to see it highlighted it was nice just to click on it and see what others thought it might be saying or have ideas on what was being said.</td>
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<td>- I thought they were straightforward and helpful in analyzing what we were reading especially because some could be difficult to understand so it was relieving to know others had similar questions as mine. I thought that you did a good job in going over major concerns in class the following day after the readings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The collaborative annotations were helpful and they helped me gain a better insight and somewhat of an understanding of the topic for the next lecture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Yes they were helpful and you should continue to do them!</td>
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<tr>
<td>- helpful</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I thought the online collaborative annotations were a good idea. It allows the class to engage with another through a way where we might be less shy to talk with another compared to discussing in class. I thought they were helpful because from reading others notes, I would get inspired and write down my own thoughts. I think this idea is great and should be used in different classes too.</td>
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Reflection – On Technology

• Access issues (pro and con) discussed above
• Reading on screens vs. reading on paper
• Discussing online vs. discussing in person
Reflection – A Community of Learners

• Actively engage in learning from one another—learners from teachers, teachers from learners, and learners from learners.
• Supports diverse student capabilities by enabling all members to participate at their level of expertise and comfort.
• Characterized by feelings of safety among participants, as well as willingness to ask questions and make mistakes.
• Motivates students so that they are more willing to persist when they are challenged or confused.
Thank You

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