

## Best Practices for Teaching with Emerging Technologies Second Edition by Michelle Pacansky-Brock Chapter 5: Tools for Participatory Learning



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For more information, please visit to book's resource site at [TeachingWithEmergingTech.com](http://TeachingWithEmergingTech.com).

### Twitter? Really?

In 2008, when Twitter was becoming a household word, I resisted using it—with passion. I was already feeling over-committed to the number of social networks I had joined and was feeling excited about many new tools I was using. For the life of me, I could not justify why I would want to use a tool that was going to spit out up to 140-character message updates about what people are doing. Really? Me a “tweeter”? What was I going to do? Follow Justin Timberlake? I had written Twitter off as an annoying, immature, superficial nuisance that clearly would add no value to my existence.

Then I found myself sitting at a conference with the complex, multi-colored session brochure laid out in front of me. I was intensely analyzing the sessions, narrowing them down by circling the ones I thought looked best—always finding more than one at each time that I wanted to go to. As I was doing this, the presenter of the general session was informing participants about the Twitter “hashtag” for the conference. I felt stupid because, while I had heard of Twitter, I had no clue what on earth a “hashtag” was and she didn’t clarify. I guess that was the moment I felt, one, like I was being left behind (a feeling I don’t like much when it comes to new technologies) but also a little intrigued. Here I was at a conference for higher education focused on emerging technologies and Twitter was integrated front and center. I



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could feel myself trying to avoid it but deep down I knew I was going to have to give Twitter a try.

Reluctantly, I set up my Twitter account and made my first Tweet, revealing my aversion, “Here it goes—another social networking tool. Could it be time for therapy?” Like most social technologies, Twitter didn’t feel social immediately. The early stages of using a new tool involves the cultivation of your community which includes the users you want to follow and those who follow you. That part took a while.

So, I set out to decode the “hashtag” concept that had been referenced earlier in the day. I was on to something when I noticed that while I was sending my Tweets from my account on Twitter.com, there was a neat little stream of Tweets appearing in a timeline feed on the conference website—packaged nicely into a little vertical box. The conference’s hashtag timeline was created using a Twitter search widget. Each time a conference participant sent a Tweet that included the conference hashtag, the Tweet appeared in the feed. A widget, again, is like a miniaturized and sometimes customized version of an application that can be embedded on a website or in a learning management system (see Chapter 1 for details on embedding).



### **HASHTAG HOW-TO**

A hashtag is, simply, a word or group of characters preceded by the hash (or number) sign, #. Hashtags may not include spaces, commas, period, exclamation points, question marks or apostrophes. They are useful, as they allow users to tag their social media content with words or phrases that allow other users to locate, collect and follow real-time conversations about specific topics.



Hashtags are not limited to Twitter, however. They are supported by all media tools, including Instagram, Facebook, Google+, Tumblr and Pinterest. For example, if I make a post on Instagram (and I have my account settings adjusted to "public") and include a particular hashtag and you make a post on Facebook that includes that same hashtag (with your post settings adjusted to "public"), anyone may go to Google.com (or any other web search tool), enter the hashtag into the search box, click enter, and view our content alongside all other publicly visible content shared with the hashtag. Keep in mind, web search results are not instant. Online content must be indexed prior to it appearing in search results. Alternatively, if you are using a social media tool, the hashtag itself appears as hyperlink within your content. Clicking on it will display a stream of all recent content shared with that tool that includes that particular hashtag.

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Grasping the concept of an embedded Twitter timeline (which, by the way, used to be referred to as a Twitter widget) was a big step in understanding how a user, like me, could locate, extract, and organize information relevant to my needs from the messy, matted, and unappealing ball of hair that I imagined Twitter to be. Now I was beginning to see this pesky little tool as a powerful, grassroots communication tool. And I felt intrigued to be part of the conversation.

Over the next two days at the conference, I used Twitter and the hashtag to share my own thoughts and reflections about the sessions I attended and deeper connections I was making. That was great, but what was really exciting, for me, was how the Twitter feed allowed me to read the fleeting thoughts of those attending a session two doors down which I would, otherwise, be completely unable to access. There was actually more than one time when I chose to leave one session and join another because I could tell, from the Tweets, that it was



more relevant to my own needs. I also found it rather interesting (and still do) when I find myself sitting in a room reading the Tweets of other people in the room with me. I find myself peering around trying to find out who is saying what—often because I think their ideas are intriguing and I want to hear more!

Since my entry into the Twitterverse in 2008, I've also had many opportunities to engage in conference backchannels that I couldn't attend in person. As I sit at home in my office, I can read the Tweets of those I follow who are at a conference on the other side of the country. This is always fun and offers an opportunity to glean resources and engage in some dialogue with educators who are physically present at the event. Walls are no longer barriers in a participatory society. In fact, now when I jump into a conference backchannel and recognize a user's name, I almost always respond with, "Are you here?" Attending face-to-face conferences has become an exciting opportunity for me to meet the individuals who I follow on Twitter and who regularly contribute to my lifelong learning.



### **GET CONNECTED WITH TWITTER HASHTAGS**

Getting familiar with commonly used Twitter hashtags is a helpful way for you to find information relevant to your interests. Enter any hashtag into the "search" box on Twitter.com and you'll retrieve a timeline of all the most recent Tweets sent with that hashtag.

If you'd like to designate a hashtag for your own class, college campus, or department all you have to do is determine the precise group of characters you'd like to use. It's a good idea to plug it into the Twitter search box to be sure it's not a popular one already—that is, unless



contributions from the Twitter community might improve your dialogue. Also keep in mind, hashtags are not like URLs. You cannot “own” one. There’s always a chance another group may begin to use it, so shoot for something unique if exclusivity is important to you.

If you’re building your Twitter network and looking to engage in some education-related chat, here are a few popular hashtags you may want to try out.

- **#onlinelearning**—chat about online learning
- **#edtech**—Tweets related to technology in education
- **#highered**—news related to college and universities
- **#comm\_college** -- news related to community colleges
- **#flipclass**—resources related to the flipped classroom model (see Introduction)
- **#accessibility** -- supporting the needs of individuals with disabilities
- **#elearning**—web-enhanced or online learning

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As you start following users on Twitter, take note of who provides you with great ideas (these may include comments, quotes or links to articles, tools, and/or blog posts). Click on a user’s name to go to the user’s profile, where you will see the timeline of Tweets sent from that account. Along the top of the timeline, you may have the option to learn more about the user. Click on "Following" to see who the user follows, "Followers" to see who follows that user, "Likes" to see a timeline of Tweets that user has liked, and "Lists" to see a list of publicly viewable lists that user has been added to.

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## SHOWCASE

### **FOLLOW 50 – TEACHING STUDENTS TO HARNESS TWITTER TO BUILD CONNECTIONS**



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Catherine Hillman, who teaches Social Media for Marketing at Cuesta College, gives her students an activity that requires them to use Twitter to locate and follow 50 experts in a topic related to their interests. The activity engages students with Twitter as a learning resource and facilitates a meaningful relationship with social media that extends well beyond the superficial application social media tools typically play in the lives of students. Through the activity, students learn how to mine Twitter for relevant content and evaluate the Tweets in their timeline using a process that Hillman refers to as “Signal-to-Noise” ratio: determine whose posts provide relevant information for your interests (“Signal”) and eliminate those whose posts are not relevant to you (“Noise”). To view the lesson plan for Hillman’s “Follow Fifty” activity (shared with a Creative Commons license) refer to the Chapter 5 online resources at: [TeachingWithEmergingTech.com](http://TeachingWithEmergingTech.com).

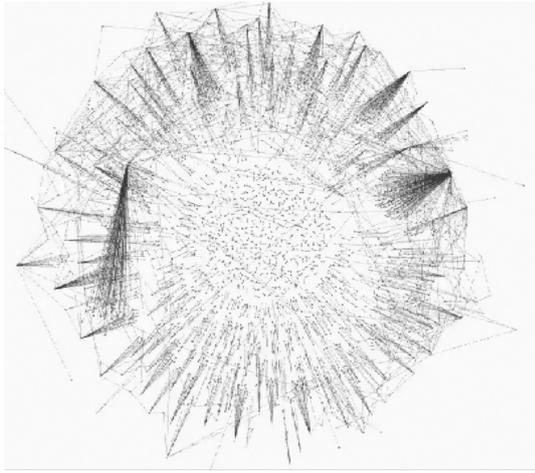
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### **The Backchannel: Teaching in a Participatory Classroom**

Trying to get more students to participate is a common struggle for college professors. “No matter what I do, it’s always the same students who raise their hands.” Sound familiar? Well, be careful what you wish for! The grassroots nature of social media is making some sweeping changes in how, when, and where people participate.

With a smartphone, tablet, or laptop connected to Twitter, learning from and with people anywhere in the world is literally just a few clicks away. According to Twitter, in March 2016, the company had more than 320 million monthly active users and supports 40 languages. Roughly 83% of actively users access Twitter with a mobile device and 79% are outside the United States.<sup>1</sup> In 2015 in the United States, about 23% of online adults used Twitter, which was a 6% growth from 2013.<sup>2</sup>





*Figure 5.1* Twitter visualization. Printed with permission from André Panisson with credit to the Computer Science Department of the University of Turin and the ISI Foundation in Turin.

In 2011, during the rise in Twitter's popularity, the world witnessed an empowering effect of social media as Egyptians shared their experiences with the world via Twitter from the street corners of Cairo. Mobile technology and social media assisted Egyptian revolutionaries with organizing and sharing their experiences, reactions, and dreams about the future with the world in real-time with text, pictures, and video.

The impact that Mubarak's resignation announcement on February 11, 2011 had on the Twitterverse was captured by André Panisson with a cutting edge visualization technology as part of an international research study. The video (which can be viewed on YouTube at: [youtu.be/2guKJfvq4uI](http://youtu.be/2guKJfvq4uI)) translates each Tweet sent with the hashtag #Jan25, which became synonymous with messages referencing events of the revolution, into a tiny node and as each Tweet is "retweeted" (forwarded by a user on to his/her own network), the node blossoms into a burst of more nodes. The video is fascinating to watch, as it illustrates the speed at which information can travel around the world with a mobile, social media tool like Twitter but it also offers each of us an opportunity to see a visual representation of what participatory learning looks like.



Twitter flattens the playing field, distributing power to all and giving members of the community the opportunity to hold each user accountable for his or her actions. Introducing Twitter into the classroom rocks the foundations of “the lecture,” as a “presentation” is no longer linear and the flow of questions and comments are no longer controllable by a single, authoritative figure. Again, this is why we began with a focus on “community” and “community ground-rules” in Chapter 1.

The phone in a person’s hand is a symbol of our new participatory society. Multimedia content creation and global engagement are now in our pockets. Feature phones—a term that simply refers to a mobile phone without an internet connection—and smartphones both have the capability to send and receive Tweets (which may be written messages, snapshots, or, in more and more instances, videos). Feature phones can be easily connected to a user’s Twitter account using SMS text messaging. What this means to you is that your students’ fleeting ideas and questions that used to be silent and unobtrusive now bubble to the surface when phones are used as learning tools in a classroom. The result is a “backchannel.” And, as many people are discovering at conferences as well as in the classroom, that backchannel can occur with or without your acknowledgment.

Cliff Atkinson, author of *The Backchannel: How Audiences are Using Twitter and Social Media and Changing Presentations Forever*, defines a backchannel as “a line of communication created by people in an audience to connect with others inside or outside the room, with or without the knowledge of the speaker at the front of the room. Usually facilitated by Internet technologies, it is spontaneous, self-directed, and limited in time to the duration of a live event.”<sup>3</sup> Backchannels are not specific to Twitter-usage but they are a phenomenon that has been influenced through the popularization of social media and the use of mobile devices. While the idea of a backchannel may make you uncomfortable and even



offer one more reason to ban cell phones from your classroom, some professors think they hold opportunities for improving classroom learning.

Backchannels are now mainstream. When we watch a live event on television, we are offered a hashtag to use to contribute our own thoughts or view the thoughts of others. Often samples of viewers' Tweets appear along the bottom of our screen, presenting us with the ability to view the event through the lenses of multiple individuals, in addition to our own. With a backchannel, an experience that was once passive is now interactive. This new multidimensional experience adds fascinating opportunities for educators to engage students in a complex fabric of multi-layered viewpoints and amplify the voices of all students.

Social technologies, like Twitter, have paved way for the emergence of cloud-based Student Response Software (SRS), which has replaced Clicker Response Systems (or clickers) that had previously been popular in higher education. With a focus on increasing engagement, SRS tools (like PollEverywhere and Top Hat, which are both discussed later in this chapter) empower students to turn a passive lecture experience into an interactive journey. While clickers required students to have access to a particular device that would grant them the ability to contribute a response to a question posed by their instructor, SRS eliminates the need for the additional device. When instructors use an SRS, students may make contributions during class (or after) by using an app installed on their smartphone or tablet or by going directly to a designated link on their laptop. SRS tools leverage the participatory spirit of a "backchannel," but provide instructors with more opportunities to align student contributions with instructional content.

Derek Bruff, a senior lecturer and director of the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University and author of *Teaching With Classroom Response System: Creating Active Learning Environments*, theorizes that backchannel tools offer opportunities to enhance the type of student engagement clickers initiate. He considers participating in a backchannel as a



form of “active listening.” Drawing from his own experiences, Bruff reflects, “When I attend a keynote talk at a conference, I’ll often Tweet about the most interesting points made by the speaker, and I’ll sometimes respond to comments made about the talk by others on the backchannel. That’s not some form of distraction or even multitasking—it’s active listening. I think it’s great that teachers are encouraging students to listen actively in similar ways in the classroom.”<sup>4</sup>

Some professors, like Bruff, are stepping out to test the waters of backchannels and explore how this new social terrain can be used to support, rather than derail, learning. From my experiences, what these professors have in common is an interest in increasing student participation in a class (physical or online) and an awareness of student learning differences. Many students feel completely comfortable asking questions in a lecture setting, but this isn’t typical of *all* students. Other students, perhaps most, will never speak up—out of fear of sounding stupid, feeling inadequate (maybe the student feels badly about her accent or was responded to in a poor manner by a professor in another class), or as a result of a cognitive learning disorder that simply affects the pace and rhythm of his learning. These are the students who are more likely to tune out and be challenged in a traditional lecture environment. Backchannel tools can provide more options for students to participate, as opposed to acting as a replacement for the verbal dialogue in a class.

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## **2 TWITTER SHOWCASES**

### **#1 - THE TWITTER EXPERIMENT (IN-CLASS USE)**

Dr. Monica Rankin, professor of history at UT Dallas, was an early adopter of Twitter in the classroom for a backchannel tool. Her work is showcased in a brief and informative video on YouTube titled “The Twitter Experiment” ([youtu.be/6WPVWDkF7U8](https://youtu.be/6WPVWDkF7U8)) that was produced by



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Kim Smith, a grad student in Emerging Media and Communications at UT Dallas. With help from her TA, Megan Malone, Rankin established a Twitter hashtag and encouraged her students to use their laptop or cell phone to send Tweets. Rankin’s 90-student class met three times each week: twice for a lecture and once, on Fridays, for a quiz and discussion. The use of Twitter was encouraged after the quiz each Friday.

Rankin notes that she had many students who didn’t know what Twitter was and had to set up accounts. Despite being encouraged to do so before class, most waited until class time to take care of this step. The first two weeks of Twitter activity was mostly “start up” content (“test, test”; “How does this work?”; etc.) with a few meaningful Tweets. This is an important point, as there is always a “start up” period with using new technologies in a class and I think instructors who understand this will plan for it, rather than view it as a nuisance, and will be more successful with their instructional goals.

Rankin acknowledges that her experiment required her to reassess things week-by-week and try new things. She found that the Tweets became more insightful and the in-class discussions became more dynamic when students were placed into small groups of 3–5 and given a topic to discuss (verbally). The groups were instructed to identify the “best” ideas and Tweet them for the rest of the class to engage their contributions.

Throughout the discussions, the Twitter stream with the students’ contributions (with use of a Twitter “search widget”) was projected on a large screen in front of the class and students with internet access could open it and view it on their own laptop or smartphone. Rankin also observed that, like most small group activities, the quality increased the more she and her TA circulated around the classroom and checked in with groups to facilitate their ideas.

Malone, Rankin’s TA, noted that the experiment was exciting because typically in a discussion there are only 3–4 students who willingly participate and with Twitter this number



increased tenfold. Additionally, having the Tweets available online enabled her to go back and follow up with the students' Tweets over the weekend with the option to send them a "direct message" (or DM) which is a private exchange on Twitter. Bobby Sibert, a student featured in Rankin's video, points out that the Tweets shared by his classmates became a valuable study resource after class, as well.

There were challenges, of course, including the 140-word limitation imposed on each Tweet. But Rankin realizes that Twitter isn't the best tool for discussion of complex ideas; rather, it should be theorized as a tool that students can use *when* they have an idea or question appropriate for a Tweet, as opposed to when it's appropriate to engage in a verbal conversation with their class peers. Moreover, she observes that requiring students to limit their ideas to 140 characters forces the students to filter their ideas and think about what they want to say and how to best say it in a succinct way. Twitter forcing students to focus? Hmmm. That's an interesting twist.

Rankin also accommodated students who didn't have a smartphone or laptop by allowing them to hand write their comments and give them to the TA who would post them to the feed after class was over. Additionally, in one instance, she engaged the Twitter stream of student comments while she was out of state traveling at a conference. As her TA conducted the discussion in person, Rankin chimed in on the feed, "Your instructor is present," and participated virtually in the exchanges. Again, walls are no longer barriers to participation!

## **#2 - TWITTER HASHTAGS BEYOND THE WALLS OF A CLASSROOM**

Dr. Diane Gusa teaches Pedagogy and Technology of Online Learning, at SUNY Canton. In this online course, she immerses her students in the use of Twitter to learn how it can foster teaching presence and students' social presence, as well as build one's professional learning network (PLN) – powerful outcomes for future online educators! To do this, Dr.



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Gusa designates a course hashtag (#EDUC300), provides the hashtag to her students, and instructs the students to send Tweets about their learning that include the hashtag. Dr. Gusa participates with her students, regularly Tweeting from her account with the hashtag.

At the start of the term, students in Gusa's class are not entirely on board with this plan. There is little buy-in about how brief Tweets can help students feel connected to one another. Gusa is aware of this reluctance and does her best to support and encourage students through the early stages of the class. Her own participation on Twitter models the effective use of Twitter to her students. Heavy modeling in the early stages of an online class is essential to on-boarding new, reluctant students. In a final blog post, one of Gusa's students shared,

*“If you asked me at the beginning of this course if I believed (developing teaching presence and social presence) could be done by utilizing social media, I would have told you, “No way.” ... I have seen the light and am amazed at how much twitter enhanced this course and broadened my horizons. It fostered our EDUC 300 learning community as we encouraged, motivated and helped each other out. Often times I felt like I was getting one on one guidance in a very public ...”*

When the course ends, the hashtag still has a function to former students. As long as they continue to use Twitter, the past students will have continued access to the hashtag conversations that ensue between students in Gusa's future classes. This provides an ongoing process for keeping current students connected in a network with past students. After class ends, Gusa transitions from course instructor to member of her students' PLN.

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## **Tools for Participatory Learning Environments**

Participatory learning is the form of learning that occurs through interactions in the public web and with social media, like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Informed by mainstream adoption of social technologies and mobile devices, participatory learning is reshaping the



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way we learn. Learning is participatory when the outcome is a product that has been constructed through contributions made by members of a group or community.

In *The Future of Thinking*, Cathy Davidson and David Theo Goldberg use participatory learning synonymously with “digital learning” and examine how it challenges many hallmarks of academia. “With digital learning, the play between technology, composer, and audience is no longer passive . . . In conventional learning institutions, the lines of authorship and authority are clearly delineated, and the place of teacher, student, and technology are well known. With digital learning, these conventional models of authority break down.”<sup>5</sup>

Transitioning into a participatory learning environment can be nerve racking for a professor, as I reflected in the introduction where I share my “flipped classroom” experiment. When you’ve been positioned as the one with the answers whose responsibility it is to pass information on to students and ensure they *know* it, facilitating a participatory learning environment may make you feel as if the stable ground beneath you is crumbling away. My advice is to remember that your role is still *essential*. It’s not any less important, just different.

To understand how I have integrated participatory learning in my own classes, visualize a spectrum with “accessing content” at one end and “contributing content” at the other. If each of my students’ learning experiences could be tracked visually on this continuum, the node representing their actions would continually shift from left to right: from accessing to contributing, back to accessing, then again to contributing. In my learning units, students begin by accessing information in a variety of formats (videos, articles, chapters, images, audio, either created by me, provided as part of the course materials, created by the students in a previous unit, or a combination of all three) and then apply what they’ve learned in participatory learning activities (creating and commenting on blog posts, commenting in and adding slides to a VoiceThread, collaboratively producing Google presentations, etc.).



Each student understands that his/her goal is to master the learning objectives for that particular unit. After a student has accessed the assigned content and made the required contributions, they “access” the contributions made by their peers—looping back to the opposite end of the spectrum—and then leave comments and feedback—looping back again. As students regularly contribute their own content (in response to the activities I have designed) and interact with the student-generated content to deconstruct, discuss, apply, analyze it, the more *participatory* the learning environment is.

The following pages offer a selection of tools that offer potential for participatory learning and several practical examples of how professors are using them to innovate their teaching approaches.

### **Slack – a communication tool for teams**

[Slack.com](https://slack.com)



#### **Feature Overview**

- A social communications tool for invited team members that keeps everyone connected across computers, phones, and tablets
- Free for the first 10,000 messages then an upgrade is required
- Invite team (or class) members using a link
- Conversations are organized by Channels, which define common themes
- Channels can be public (open to all team members) or private (only select team members may join)
- When links to media (Google Docs, YouTube videos, images, and more) are included in a post, the media is automatically embedded



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- Individual and group direct message feature
- Search features provides easy way to locate topics
- Users may program “do not disturb” hours to turn notifications off during non-work times
- Terrific online support that includes helpful getting started guides

If you’ve been looking for a communication tool other than email that is efficient, easy-to-use, and flexible, you will love Slack. Slack is designed to support internal team communications for the workplace, but can be used to support class interactions. The Channels feature is a perfect way to organize topics and create private spaces for small groups of students to interact and work on projects. Team members post messages and content directly into specific channels (or create a new one if an appropriate one does not exist) and, in the process, everything in Slack is indexed and archived in one place, as opposed to separate emails and text messages. Slack becomes like a searchable archive of all your class or team communications and content. Slack connects with more than 500 applications (including Zoom, Google Hangouts, Google Docs, Skype, and Twitter), which streamlines the user experience by creating a single content portal for all your team’s tools. One of my favorite features of Slack is the ability to react to any message with an emoji. Team members can quickly share a “thumbs up” icon, for example, to indicate that you’re in agreement instead of responding with an additional message.



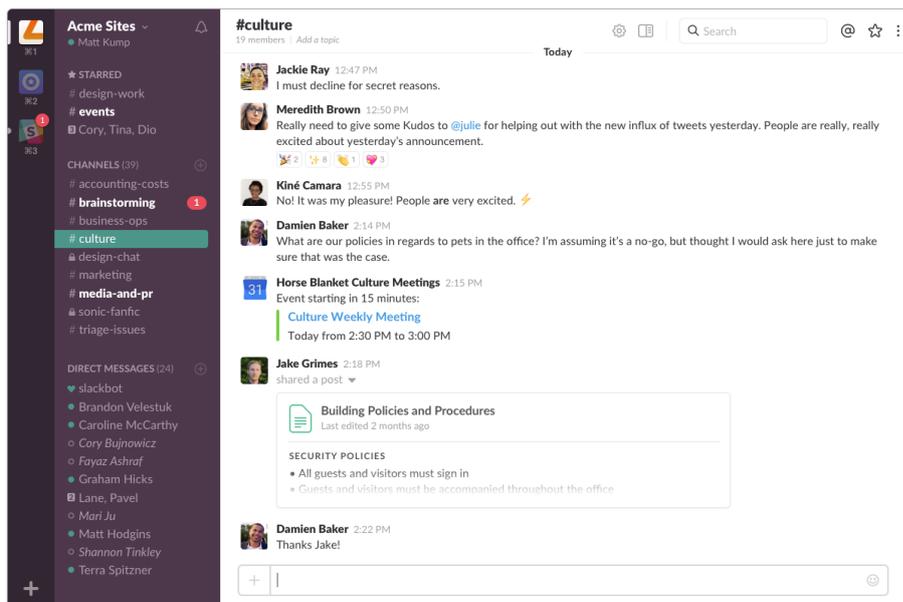


Figure 5.2 Screenshot of team communications in Slack. Used with permission from Slack.

## Padlet – post to a digital bulletin board from a phone without an account

[Padlet.com](http://Padlet.com)



### Feature Overview

- Free accounts for individuals and premium institutional licenses.
- A Padlet is like a digital piece of paper that students can post to without an account from a mobile device or computer.
- Posts may include links, photos (online, uploaded from your computer, or taken from your webcam/phone), and typed responses.
- Privacy options: private, password protected, secret (unlisted), public
- You choose the access level you want others to have: can read (view only), can write (view and post), can moderate (view, post, edit and approve other posts)
- Embed code makes it easy to put a Padlet in your course.



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- Customizable backgrounds
- Grid or free flow organization options
- May be shared with a link or embedded in a website or LMS

Padlet has many uses! It's a terrific tool to coordinate a brainstorming activity -- post names of famous artists -- to kick off a new unit, assess engagement by having students post their clearest or muddiest point from a class, or review for a test by propose exam questions. When you create a Padlet you have the option to use a custom URL, which makes sharing the link with students in a class much easier. Padlet incorporates a range of privacy options too, includes the option to identify a moderator for your board, and instantly provides a QR code for each Padlet you create. One caveat to be aware of, however, is that the posts on a Padlet are anonymous. You will need to instruct your students to include their name at the top of their post if you want to be able to identify them.

I've used Padlet in an online course as a place for students to post questions prior to a synchronous meeting. For example, I arrange a live meeting with my students and ask them to post topics on the Padlet board that they'd like us to discuss. This process helps students to understand that our live time together is not a time for me to lecture; rather, it's a time to discuss their questions. I find that students are more willing to list these topics using Padlet, than raise the questions during a live session.

Would you like to give Padlet a try? Here is a sample I created for you to experiment (shown in Figure 5.3). Try it out from your phone too! [padlet.com/brocansky/tryit](https://padlet.com/brocansky/tryit)



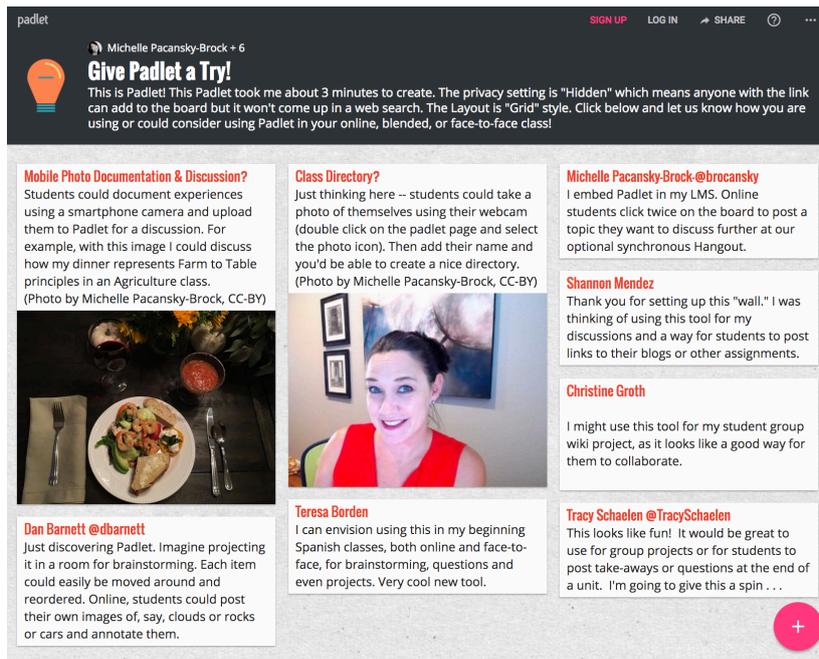


Figure 5.3 Screenshot of a Padlet. Used with permission from Padlet.

## Tackk

[Tackk.com](http://Tackk.com)



### Feature Overview

- Free. At the time of writing, Tackk is planning to release a premium account for educators that will improve the ability to collect and review student work.
- Create single page, social websites.
- Public and unlisted publishing options.
- Drag and drop interface enables easy multimedia integration (plug in a URL from YouTube, search for a photo from 500px, upload a graphic of your own, type instructions or a reflection).
- Creative options for customizing the look and feel of your site.



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- Instantly collect all of your students' sites by using the Tackboard feature (see below).

Tackk provides an easy way to create a single webpage with the option to include a stream at the bottom of the page in which others may leave comments. Commenting on a Tackk does not require a person to have an account; however, account holders have the ability to add images and videos to their comments. And the Tackkboard feature is especially appealing to instructors who like the idea of have students use Tackk, but struggle with understanding how to track, view, and assess all the individual links created by students.

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## **TACKK TIP!**

### **CREATE A TACKKBOARD - A COLLECTION OF TACKKS WITH A CONSISTENT TAG**

A Tackkboard is a URL that showcases all of the public Tackks that are tagged with the same keyword. The URL for a Tackboard always following this logic: `tackk.com/board/tag`. Replace *tag* with the keyword that each Tackk is tagged with. When you create or edit a Tackk, you will find a field labeled Tackkboards in the Options area. This is where you enter the tags. This feature has many applications for teaching and learning. One downside to Tackkboards is the appearance of an ad at the top of the page.

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I used Tackk to create a module overview for each module in my History of Still Photography online course. I did this because creating an overview page in Tackk produces more visually appealing content than using the editor in my LMS. In Tackk, I



can easily embed an engaging photograph at the top that relates to our module, a brief YouTube video of myself introducing the unit, select a lively color and pattern, and then I embed the Tackk right inside my LMS (I've done this in Blackboard and Canvas) and it's also available publicly. With the content publicly accessible, I am able to include a link to each module overview in the course syllabus. This way, students always have a clear list of the weekly activities, even before class starts, and they have access to the overviews in the LMS and in the syllabus. I find this helpful for students, as many of them are away for parts of the semester and the overviews allow them to look ahead and see what we'll be doing during their time away. In my syllabus, I also include a link to the Tackkboard, which is a page students can visit to view all of the overviews in one place. To view all of the module overview Tackks, go to: [tackk.com/board/hosp](http://tackk.com/board/hosp)

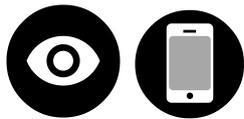
I have also used Tackk for a student-generated, extra credit website project. The activity was titled Photo Quest. Students chose one of three challenges and created a Tackk (tagged with the same keyword) as the final deliverable. The challenges (Who am I? and Where do I come from?) required students to engage on a more intimate level with photographs. Students were required to have conversations about their ancestry and family history with family members and/or friends. The conversations had to be accompanied by photographs. The student's goal was to identify one photograph that played a significant role in unveiling a part of his or her past that was unknown. Then, in a Tackk, the students shared a digital version of the photograph and wrote about the experience. In short, the Tackks were like blog posts. One of my students shared a faded image of himself and his sister at ages 3 and 5, each clutching an old toy. He went on to explain that the photograph showed him on his first day of kindergarten in Mexico. His teacher had given every student a toy to take home. At pick-up, upon seeing all of other children with toys, his toyless sister began to cry. His teacher reached out and gave her a



toy too. The picture shows them both happy and proudly displaying their toys. My student didn't have a memory of this event before having the conversation about the photograph and he also did not know that he had attended Mexico in kindergarten.

## ThingLink

[ThingLink.com](http://ThingLink.com) - make images interactive



### *Feature Overview*

- Many account types: Basic Education (free), Pro Teacher (includes a groups feature for managing classes), Premium Teacher (and Schools/Districts)
- Compare account features here: [thinglink.com/edu-options](http://thinglink.com/edu-options)

With ThingLink, you can turn any digital image into an interactive bulletin board. The posts (or “things”) that are added to an image in ThingLink unlock an additional layer of information about the visual content. For example, a photograph of a building may reveal hidden architectural terms; a campus map could contain memories from students' freshman semester; an image of a well-known photograph may unveil stories about the photograph's context, photographer's life, or process used to make it; an old master painting may identify the figures illustrated in the shadows. Break students up into small groups, assign one ThingLink challenge to each group and see how much information they can add to an image in 10 minutes. Then project each image and review their contributions as a class. Or at the end of a class, post a picture about an important topic that was covered and have students write a 2-3 sentence takeaway about the lesson. This is an engaging way to integrate a formative assessment at the end of class.



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## TodaysMeet – temporary digital rooms for backchannels

[TodaysMeet.com](http://TodaysMeet.com)



### *Feature Overview*

- Free, easy to use.
- Those participating in the conversation do not need an account to comment.
- Upgraded account provides access to these “Teacher Tools”: Permanent access to room transcripts, ability to pause rooms, limit room membership to students at your institution, password protect rooms, moderate conversations, post a prompt at the top of your room’s page to keep conversations focused.

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### **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> Twitter website. Retrieved on July 25, 2016 from <https://about.twitter.com/company>.

<sup>2</sup> Duggan, M., Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C., Lenhart, A., Madden, M. (2015). Social Media Update 2014. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/demographics-of-key-social-networking-platforms-2/>.

<sup>3</sup> Atkinson, C. (2009). How People are Using Twitter and Social Media and Changing Presentations Forever. Berkeley, CA: New Riders Press.

<sup>4</sup> Bruff, D. (2011, May 17). Backchannel (and me) in the New York Times. Agile Learning. [blog post]. Retrieved from: <http://derekbruff.org/?p=979>.

<sup>5</sup> Davidson, C. & Goldbert, D. T. (2010). *The Future of Thinking: Learning Institutions in a Digital Age*. The MIT Press. Cambridge, MA.

