

Online Collaboration: The New Group Format

Like many professors in my age group, the transition from lecture based, traditional classroom models to technology inclusive, collaborative approaches to adult learning did not come easily or naturally for me. However, I arrived at the realization that students today, even good students, were simply unable to adequately assimilate information with traditional, instructor-driven, models. Continued effectiveness in the classroom would require new skills and adjustments on my part.

I began to seek out various on-line tools to encourage interaction and collaborative work. I discovered a product called [Evernote™](#) that allows students to share virtual “notebooks” so they can compile materials for group projects in one place. Evernote™ is a free service available on most electronic devices. It allows users to type notes into an Evernote™ notebook and access those notes from anywhere. Students may record information in text, audio or visual format with text being searchable within images.

In a project group, each student is able to go to the document stored in Evernote™ and edit or revise, thus eliminating the frustration students often have in relation to coordinating schedules to arrange meeting times for group work. Everyone has access to all of the articles and other resources for the project and can add resources at any time. Suddenly, students were contributing more, creating more as a group, instead of relying on one person to compile the project, and completing projects within the time frames assigned. Complaints related to “social loafing” subsided. My skepticism waned.

As I pondered other ways that students might be able to work “together” from a distance, I discovered [StudyBlue™](#). The collaborative features of StudyBlue™ are part of what earned them a place in the 2012, *Top 25 Websites for Teaching and Learning*, awarded by the American Association of School Librarians.¹ StudyBlue™ created the ability for students to share virtual “backpacks” with their classmates, enabling collaboration of a flashcard database for their specific course, text or discipline. Students can learn from classmates as well as approximately one million users worldwide, who add roughly 2 million new flashcards each week through the shared database.² As students enter their flashcard, they are shown approximately 30 related cards from their classmates or students in general. They can then add another student’s card to their deck, use their own, or both.

Evernote™ teamed up with StudyBlue™ to allow students to take their Evernote™ notebooks and transfer them to their virtual “backpack” in StudyBlue™ where they can make their interactive flashcards (which can include text, audio and imagery), study guides and quizzes that are available on both desktop and mobile devices without having to retype data. Evernote™ accounts, or specific notebooks within accounts, can be set to automatically sync with StudyBlue™ upon login at StudyBlue™.

In my class, I encourage students to type notes in Evernote™ or export them from Word™ into Evernote™, sync and study with StudyBlue™. This ability to access notes and flashcards quickly and easily, via mobile device, has increased interaction with the material and encouraged students to build their knowledge base together. Both tools appeal to our tech savvy student population by providing a cutting edge, convenient way to accomplish course objectives and projects.

¹ Habley, Jennifer, (2012) AASL announces 2012 Best Websites for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved from American Library Association,

<http://www.ala.org/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/bestlist/bestwebsites25>

² Klündt, Christopher. (2012) StudyBlue Unveils World's Largest Digital Study Group. Retrieved from StudyBlue,

<http://www.studyblue.com/about/press/studyblue-unveils-worlds-largest-digital-study-group/>

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