

# HOW AND WHY TEACHERS USE PINTEREST FOR PLANNING

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**Abstract** - Pinterest is a social media site frequently used by teachers. This pilot study surveyed teachers' Pinterest usage including what types of resources teachers look for and what education related activities they participate in. The researcher found that teachers frequently use Pinterest to find resources designed to increase student engagement and aid in their planning. They also often find visual aides for teaching and resources to enhance their classroom environment on Pinterest appreciating its ease of use, creative resources, and their ability to learn from others utilizing Pinterest. Although there are many opportunities for teachers to share resources, network with others, and attain professional development on Pinterest, the teachers in this study did not typically utilize it for these purposes.

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Before the Internet, teachers' short- and long-term planning relied on sources such as previous lessons taught, handouts, audiovisual materials, resource files, ideas shared by colleagues (Sardo-Brown, 1990) and materials purchased from local education distributors who controlled the type and quality of resources available (McCutcheon, 1980). Planning was greatly influenced by the materials and resources in the school or library (McGee & Taylor, 2001). However, since the invention of the Internet, teachers have been able to use online resources to help plan their lessons and activities (Hedtke, Kahlert, & Schwier, 2001) in addition to share ideas and collaborate with one another (Green & Green, 2014).

It is not surprising that teachers frequently utilize online resources for planning considering they use a wide variety of technologies throughout the school day (Wang, Hsu, Campbell, Coster, & Longhurst, 2014). Their early use of technologies such as digital resources has been noted (Snelson, 2011). For almost two decades teachers have looked online when planning (Williams, 2004), looking for high-quality, ready-to-use teaching resources (Gray, Thomas, & Lewis, 2010). Pinterest has become an especially popular online resource for teachers.

Pinterest is a social media site which acts as a digital scrapbook. It was launched in 2010 and is the fastest-growing website in history, reaching 10 million unique monthly visitors in the United States more quickly than any other standalone social media site (Constine, 2012). Pinterest grew from 5,000 users in August 2010 to 17 million less than two years later. The site had more than 70 million total users as of 2013 with about 45% of those users coming from outside of the United States (Maina, 2015). A 2013 Pew Research Center survey found that approximately 73% of online adults were using social net-working sites (Duggan & Smith, 2013) and that Pinterest was the social media site with the largest increase of users that year when compared to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Recently, Pinterest

has reported it has 100 million monthly active users (Beck, 2015) and that twenty-six percent of all U.S. adults report using it (Pew Research Center, 2016). Pinterest is especially popular with the education community. Sixty-nine percent of teachers report using it for their classroom (Devaney, 2016).

Pinterest is a popular site for teachers because it allows them to create theme-based pinboards where they can post, collect, and group teaching resources and ideas which can be used by themselves and others. Teachers can interact with one another by sharing, pinning, and commenting on one another's pins. There are over 500,000 education pins pinned daily (Cameron Jarvis, 2013). Many teachers particularly appreciate their ability to supplement their textbooks and curriculum with up-to-date materials and ideas (Hooks, 2015).

Although Pinterest is a widely utilized resource, research about Pinterest is limited because of its fairly recent invention. There have been a few studies related to best practice using Pinterest (Hansen, Nowlan, & Winter, 2012), why people use Pinterest (Gilbert, Bakhshi, Chang, & Terveen, 2013), and what people pin (Hall & Zarro, 2013). However, there is very little research looking at how teachers can or do use Pinterest. Recently, there have been a few conference presentations addressing these issues (Carpenter, Abrams, & Dunphy, 2016; Hu & Torphy, 2016; VanOverbeke, & Stefanick, 2016). However, there is very little published research.

The only published research was conducted by the RAND Corporation looking at Implementation of K-12 State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy (ELA) which included findings regarding the top online resources consulted for instruction among mathematics and ELA teachers in both elementary and secondary schools. Although Pinterest usage was not the focus of the study, the researchers did discover some important information regarding Pinterest usage. They found that 86% of

elementary and 63% of secondary teachers report using Pinterest as a resource when planning lessons. They also noted that teachers refer to Pinterest for planning more often than websites designed specifically for instruction such as [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org) or [engageny.org](http://engageny.org). In fact, the researchers found that the only site consulted more for planning than Pinterest was Google (Opfer, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016). These findings support the prevalence of Pinterest usage by teachers while planning. However, they don't provide any insight into how Pinterest is specifically being used by teachers. Therefore, this pilot study is designed to discover how teachers are using Pinterest.

## METHODS

The current study was designed to survey classroom teachers regarding their Pinterest usage. Because it was a pilot study, a convenience sample was utilized. A total of 356 teachers who had either hosted pre-service teachers from the college the researcher teaches in or graduated from the education program the researcher teaches in were asked to complete the survey. All of the teachers were e-mailed an introductory letter summarizing the nature of the study inviting them to complete the survey. Seventy teachers completed the survey, representing a 19.7% response rate. The teachers who responded represented a variety of grade levels including 38 primary, 22 upper elementary, 7 middle school, and 3 high school teachers.

**Survey:** Participants completed the 45-question survey through Qualtrics, an online survey provider. The survey consisted of 3 parts with a total of 43 multiple-choice questions and two open-ended questions. First, respondents were asked demographic questions regarding the grade they taught, whether they have a Pinterest account, etc. Second, they were asked to identify the frequency they look for different types of educational resources on Pinterest (e.g. science experiments, literature reviews, etc.) and how often they use Pinterest to do a variety of education related activities (e.g. network with other teachers, organize and store ideas, etc.). Teachers responded to questions regarding frequency using a five-point Likert scale including never, infrequently, sometimes,

frequently, and very frequently. The third section of the survey included open-ended questions asking respondents to identify benefits they found utilizing Pinterest for their classroom and teaching.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze and report the percentage of teachers who accessed particular resources on Pinterest. Table 1 shows the percentage of teachers that frequently reported looking for different types of educational resources on Pinterest (e.g. science experiments, literature reviews, etc.). As you can see, many teachers frequently use Pinterest to get ideas for visual displays to aid in their teaching [anchor charts (57%)] and enhance their classroom environment and management [class organization ideas (51%) and classroom displays (56%)]. They also often use Pinterest to increase student engagement [hands-on activities (53%), activities (50%), project ideas (40%), game ideas (40%), and art projects (30%)] and help find subject specific content [content related to Language arts (44%), content related to math (43%), and children's literature ideas (29%)].

It is interesting to note that while teachers frequently use Pinterest for content related to Language Arts (44%) and math (43%), they infrequently use it to find content related to social science (19%) or science (16%). It is unclear whether this is because Pinterest is a more valuable resource for Language Arts and math or if this is due to the limited amount of time many teachers spend teaching science and social studies.

Another interesting finding is that there are many things that teachers could use Pinterest for more frequently than they do. Teachers rarely utilize Pinterest for professional development [teaching methods (14%) or tutorials (1%)] or for resources to be used outside of school [homework resources (11%) and resources for parents (9%)]. There are also some planning resources and materials that the teachers in this study rarely used [science experiments (14%), lesson plans (14%), and pictures (13%)].

	Frequently	Sometimes	Infrequently or Never
Anchor Charts	57%	24%	19%
Classroom Displays	56%	31%	13%
Hands-on Activities	53%	33%	14%
Class Organization Ideas	51%	38%	11%
Activities	50%	36%	14%
Content Related to Language Arts	44%	29%	27%

Content Related to Math	43%	34%	23%
Project Ideas	40%	50%	10%
Game Idea	40%	36%	24%
Art Projects	30%	31%	39%
Children's Literature Ideas	29%	50%	21%
Behavior Management Ideas	23%	44%	33%
Worksheets	21%	33%	46%
Content Related to Social Studies	19%	31%	50%
Content Related to Science	16%	40%	44%
Technology Recommendations	14%	43%	43%
Teaching Methods	14%	33%	53%
Science Experiments	14%	35%	51%
Lesson Plans	14%	33%	53%
Pictures	13%	31%	56%
Homework Resources	11%	23%	66%
Resources for Parents	9%	27%	64%
Tutorials	1%	12%	87%

**Table 1: Percentage of Teachers Who Frequently or Infrequently Look for the Following Resources on Pinterest**

Table 2 shows the percentage of teachers that use Pinterest to do a variety of education related activities (e.g. network with other teachers, organize and store ideas, etc.). Pinterest describes itself as “the world’s catalog of ideas”, and that seems to be the primary way teachers are utilizing it beyond finding resources [organize / store ideas (64%)].

The teachers surveyed do not seem to frequently be using Pinterest to interact with others [create class

pages (0%), share resources with students (0%), network with teachers (4%), collaborate with teachers (6%), or read teacher blogs (17%)] or for professional development [learn about issues related to education (1%) and access professional development (4%)]. They also are not using Pinterest to share their work with others [post lesson plans / activities (3%)]. It is interesting to note that while 31% of the teachers frequently follow other teachers, 44% of teachers surveyed infrequently or never follow other teachers.

	Frequently	Sometimes	Infrequently or Never
Organize / Store Ideas	64%	19%	17%
Follow Other Teachers	31%	25%	44%
Read Teacher Blogs	17%	33%	50%
Collaborate with Teachers	6%	15%	79%
Network with Teachers	4%	15%	80%
Access Professional Development	4%	13%	83%
Post Lesson Plans / Activities	3%	4%	93%
Learn about Issues Related to Education	1%	26%	73%
Plan or Locate Virtual Field Trips	0%	14%	86%
Share Resources with Students	0%	9%	91%
Create Class Pages	0%	1%	99%

**Table 2: Percentage of Teachers Who Frequently or Infrequently Do the Following Activities on Pinterest**

The open-ended qualitative survey responses regarding benefits of Pinterest were coded to identify themes utilizing an open coding approach in accordance with established guidelines (Creswell, 2005). Teachers reported ease of use, creativity of resources, and learning about what other teachers are

doing as the main benefits of using Pinterest. Regarding ease of use, teachers often responded that ideas are easy to find and quick to implement on Pinterest. One teacher shared “The connectivity is great as most of the time you just click on the pin and within seconds you are able to get

directions/information on that idea.” Another stated, “I prefer seeing an image rather than a link that I then have to click on and scroll through until I find something that inspires me. I feel that I get ideas much quicker through Pinterest.”

Creativity was also a frequent benefit shared by teachers. For example, teachers explained that “Pinterest has so many ideas for differentiating lessons and showing new ways of teaching lessons that I would never think of on my own!” and “I love finding creative ideas that I can model my lessons after. I see no point in ‘reinventing the wheel’. If there is something great out there that will help engage my students in learning, I want to use it!” Many of the teachers also talked about enjoying using Pinterest to learn about what other teachers are doing in their classrooms. “I have found really great ideas for stations, activities, bulletin boards, classroom management, and more on Pinterest. A lot of pins link to teacher blogs, and I like reading about other teachers' experiences to see if they are applicable to my classroom.” A similar comment was that “I like to see how other teachers create anchor charts, use space, solve organizational issues and motivate students.”

## CONCLUSIONS

Pinterest is a frequently used social media site that provides many resources designed to increase student engagement and aid in teacher planning. It also provides visual aides for teaching and resources to enhance the classroom environment. Teachers frequently utilize Pinterest due to its ease of use, creative ideas, and the ability to learn from others. Pinterest provides numerous opportunities to share resources, network with others, and for professional development. However, the teachers in this study did not typically utilize it for these purposes. The reasons may be related to the limitations of this study including a small local sample, participant self-selection, and teacher respondents representing a wide range of age / grade levels. Much more research is needed regarding teachers' use of Pinterest. One area of particular interest is if teachers of different grade levels utilize Pinterest differently. A majority of the teachers who responded to this study teach in the primary grades. Therefore, it would seem as though Pinterest might be used most frequently by teachers of young children. It would be interesting to explore further how teachers of young children utilize Pinterest.

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