

Social Bookmarking for Your Classroom

This CTL Bulletin starts a series of Bulletins that will introduce you to a set of relatively new technology tools, commonly referred-to as Web 2.0 or also “the Read/Write Web,” that have tremendous potential for classroom use and beyond. The big pedagogical advantage of these tools is that they get students actively engaged in not only learning, but also producing knowledge. These Bulletins will be supplemented with additional information on the CTL website at: www.neiu.edu/~ctl/teaching/web2.html.

Introduction to Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarking is one of a number of popular Web 2.0 tools—along with wikis, blogs, and social networking—that are known for free access, ease of use, and collaborative potential. A social bookmarking site allows a user to save links to sites as they browse the web. The user can “tag” each site saved with one or more descriptive keywords, which are then used for sorting and organizing the overall collection of sites. For example, a user might save the link to the CTL’s Blackboard page and tag it Blackboard and Tutorials. A page is created for each user where his or her links and tags are listed. Social bookmarking sites serve individual needs not only by keeping track of sites to revisit, but also by allowing access to those site links from any connected computer (unlike the favorites feature in a browser application).

Will Richardson (2006) gives a good example of how Social Bookmarking works: “Say you’re teaching *Romeo and Juliet*, and you come across a great resource site for the book. When you tag it with your bookmarking software, you see that a dozen other people have also saved the site. When you click on one of the user names, you find that person has a whole folder dedicated to *Romeo and Juliet* resources. Great! You can now subscribe to that person’s *Romeo and Juliet* folder. Then, any time that person adds another site about *Romeo and Juliet*, you’ll be notified... You can do the same for your class of students. First you have your students subscribe to a particular folder you created just for that subject. That way, any time you link and comment on a site you’ve found relevant to their study, they’ll automatically get it too.”

The important characteristics of this tool are: (a) Users become engaged in customizing personal collections of relevant resources; (b) They can easily find other people with similar interests; (c) They share specific resources with a few like-minded people; (d) They can grow quality resources on a particular topic rapidly; and (e) They have the experience of becoming part of a larger community (potentially across the world) that shares a similar interest.

Classroom Uses of Social Bookmarking

The following suggestions come from Gabriela Grosseck’s online article “Using Del.icio.us in Education.”

Support for Lectures

One option for using social bookmarking for a course is to assemble a collection of sites and provide students information on accessing them. You might include sites of specific use in your course, some that provide additional references for students who want to do further research on a topic, or, alternately, some that work as basic references to get students up to speed on one or more course topics. You can also tag specific sites for specific students, assigning tags that identify an individual or group. The notes field in the tagging window can contain your comments about why the site is relevant as well as questions students should ask themselves as they peruse it.

Mechanism for Building Learning Communities

Invite students to contribute to an archive of links for a particular course. In addition, have them recommend sites to each other on the basis of different projects and interests fellow students are pursuing in your course. Advantages: (a) the links database is enriched year after year and remains available to students even after they graduate. The instructor, too, benefits from richer resources semester after semester. (b) After the course ends, interested students can use the periodically updated tags in order to stay informed long after textbooks have been resold and Blackboard courses have become unavailable.

Contributing to Audiences beyond the Campus

Students are producing for a "real" audience, not just for a grade. The bookmarked resources tagged and created by students can reach people beyond the classroom and may even attract authorities in the field. That way, even students can become valued sources of information for a scholarly audience.

Mechanism for Getting to Know Your Students

Faculty can discover what the students' needs and interests are by following their accounts: what subjects they link to, what tags they use, how they annotate and classify resources, etc. This allows teaching to become more tailored to students' interests and experiential backgrounds.

Developing Content Management Abilities

Creating a personal system for storing web resources contributes to students' information literacy. They have to weigh whether a resource is important, what makes it worth sharing with others, how to tag it meaningfully, which notes to add, etc. This helps students learn how to organize and engages them in the learning process.

Getting Started with del.icio.us (<http://delicious.com>)

If your students are already using social bookmarking, there are a number of sites they might be using; del.icio.us is one of the most well known. As is typical of these sites (and Web 2.0 sites in general), it's easy to create an account and begin using del.icio.us. Click Join Now on the home page and fill in a bit of information. You will also want to install the del.icio.us toolbar during the sign-up process; this toolbar will make it easy for you to create your collection of links. Brief tutorials are available for new users, though many will find it easy enough to jump right in without instruction.

To tag a site, simply visit the site and then click the Tag button. A window will open where you can add tags and notes. You can also give the link a more memorable title. There is an option to make a link private if desired (all links are public by default, meaning others can see what you've linked to). Click Submit to finish the process.