How Social Bookmarking Can Help The 21st Century Teacher

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ABSTRACT

Social bookmarking, as an important tool for connecting, organizing and retaining online information, is presented in this article. The authors demonstrate how they use diigo to communicate with others in their professional communities and groups as well as how they use this tool for developing their online libraries. Suggestions are offered for how social bookmarking can enhance classroom teaching and learning.

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If you're like many teachers, you have access to computers at home and in school. Yet when saving your favorite website onto one of them, it is all too easy to forget which computer holds a specific bookmark. Sometimes you want to share a website with others and find yourself emailing hyperlinks or website addresses to them so they will enjoy the same sites. There is an easier way to use and share websites with others. Social bookmarking is one of the new Web 2.0 technologies that may be helpful to you. With social bookmarking teachers can have instant access to their favorite websites regardless of which computer they use. Social bookmarking allows teachers to create groups whose members have access to their favorite websites as well as their tags, responses and annotations about websites and online materials. If you encounter a website that you are certain someone else will appreciate, you can forward your bookmark to that person's email. Welcome to the world of social bookmarking!

Bookmarking is a common strategy we have all used for many years. Often we use sticky notes with our classroom textbooks. Such sticky notes can be color-coded and come in a variety of sizes. The colors and sizes often mean something special to us. For example, we typically use small sticky notes for remembering key ideas in a textbook chapter, larger ones for noting what we want to share with students, and yellow (particular color is optional) ones containing questions to ask our students about their understanding of what they read. Yet there are problems using paper sticky notes, and among them are the following: (1) Sticky notes fall off and when they do, we can't efficiently find the spot they marked. (2) Over time they look messy. (3) Books

can be heavy and cumbersome, and sometimes we even forget to bring them to class. (4) Students generate lively discussions about topics being studied and frequently they ask for other resources to help with their questions. In such cases we make notes to ourselves about resources we might share, but all too often we lose these notes, our ideas are forgotten or we can't quite remember the source we wanted to share. In short, physical bookmarks have many challenges.

Online social bookmarking is a better idea for today's busy teachers. It allows us to bookmark online pages, including websites, pdfs, podcasts and videos. In essence, with social bookmarking we produce an online, readily available library collection to read and share, without fear that we won't be able to locate our resource again. Instead of having numerous books on bookshelves, we have our bookmarked materials stored in this online library. Our libraries are organized by tags, which are key concept words that allow for easy retrieval.

What makes the experience *social* is that we can choose to share bookmarks with others and we can look at their bookmarks too. With social bookmarking we can send our websites to others we have selected or groups we have formed or joined. Conversely, we can follow others and see what they are bookmarking—finding others with similar interests is particularly helpful today given how literacy theories and practices are changing at such a rapid pace.

There are a variety of social bookmarking systems. [See http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-bookmarking-websites, for a summary of the top 20 social bookmarking systems currently used (4/2/10).] Two that are very popular for educators and students are de.lici.ous (www.delicious.com) and diigo (www.diigo.com). Although de.lici.ous is more popular than diigo, we recommend the latter because it has more useful features, including annotations and tags, for classroom and specialist teachers. [diigo's name is an acronym for Digest of Internet Information, Group and Other stuff (http://www.crunchbase.com/company/diigo).

We keep our diigo toolbar at the top of our browsers and anytime we want to remember a website, we click 'bookmark.' Figure 1 displays an example from Pete's browser bar.

Figure 1: *Pete's Browser Bar with diigo*
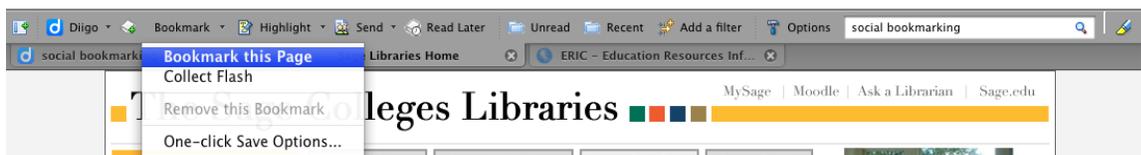
Like most bookmarking systems, diigo has an annotation feature with tags. We tend to read through and then write an annotation focusing on whatever we want to recall in a very succinct fashion.

The first annotation in Figure 2 tells us that Kay has bookmarked a PPt regarding learning online with Web 2.0 tools, which she might want to include in her online course (MTX 556—Literacy and Technology in the K-12 Classroom), while the second annotation indicates the website has what Kay perceives to be helpful teacher and Web 2.0 tools. The annotations can be concise or longer depending on the purposes.

Figure 2: *Example of Kay's Annotations Using diigo*

Other features that set diigo apart include highlighting, commenting and posting sticky notes. Virtual highlighting works much like highlighting in hard copy. Kay uses 'yellow' for general highlighting and 'blue' for the nuggets that she wants to 'pop-out' visually. When Kay was looking for specific usage of de.lici.ous and diigo, she found ebizMBA summarized the United State's usage of the largest social bookmarking websites ranked by a combination of Inbound Links, Alexa Rank, and U.S. traffic data from Compete and Quantcast (http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-bookmarking-websites),so she highlighted in yellow (see Figure 3) to show that these data are likely to be reliable.

Figure 3: *Kay's highlighting content using diigo*

Because she was specifically interested in data on diigo and its use, she marked it in blue to show content she wants to remember as illustrated in Figure 4 (http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-bookmarking-websites).

Figure 4: *Kay's highlighting of diigo usage*

She can comment on particular pages by posting questions or making remarks. Frequently she shares her bookmark to a predetermined group. The group members can elect to respond to her comments or questions—thus a targeted discussion is started. Kay posts virtual sticky notes without the fear that they will be lost—she uses these notes to share questions and connections for her students and others with similar interests

Let us illustrate with other examples of how social bookmarking might be used in school. Kay recently 'discovered' the new Web 2.0 tool, glogster, (www.glogster.com), an online multimedia poster, that she believes has tremendous potential for developing students' digital literacy skills, including the integration of visual, video and audio files. She thought glogster.com would be a useful site for the courses she is presently teaching—specifically, it might be helpful to the graduate tutors in their work with children, and it might be of interest to graduate students who were designing their own multimedia projects. So here's what she did:

Kay clicked on the diigo bookmark to save the site (glogster.com). Then she wrote an annotation about it and composed tags for the site. For her purposes, she used 'RWL 604' and 'MTX*556' as tags because she wanted to use glogster for these courses. Then, she thought about other tags that might help her categorize and ultimately retrieve this website for other purposes (see Figure 5 on next page). She included 'Web2.0' and 'multimedia' as tags with the former being a broader umbrella and the latter being more specific to include digital audio/visual/video, etc. media. These tags meant something to her, though multimedia may not mean the same to another person.

Next, Kay had choices about how (or if) she would share the glogster site on diigo. She could select private or public setting; she selected the 'public' option which means anyone could find her tags (multimedia, web*2.0), though it is highly unlikely anyone would search for her course numbers. She felt that Web2.0 tools may be a descriptor someone would search and, if they do, her bookmarked sites would 'pop' up for them to see. The bottom of figure 5 and Figure 6 show that Kay decided to share the site with pre-established groups, pertaining to the courses she teaches (MTX 556 and RWL-604 Spring) as well as a group she formed (NYSRA 2010) and a group she has joined as a member (Discovery Educator Network).

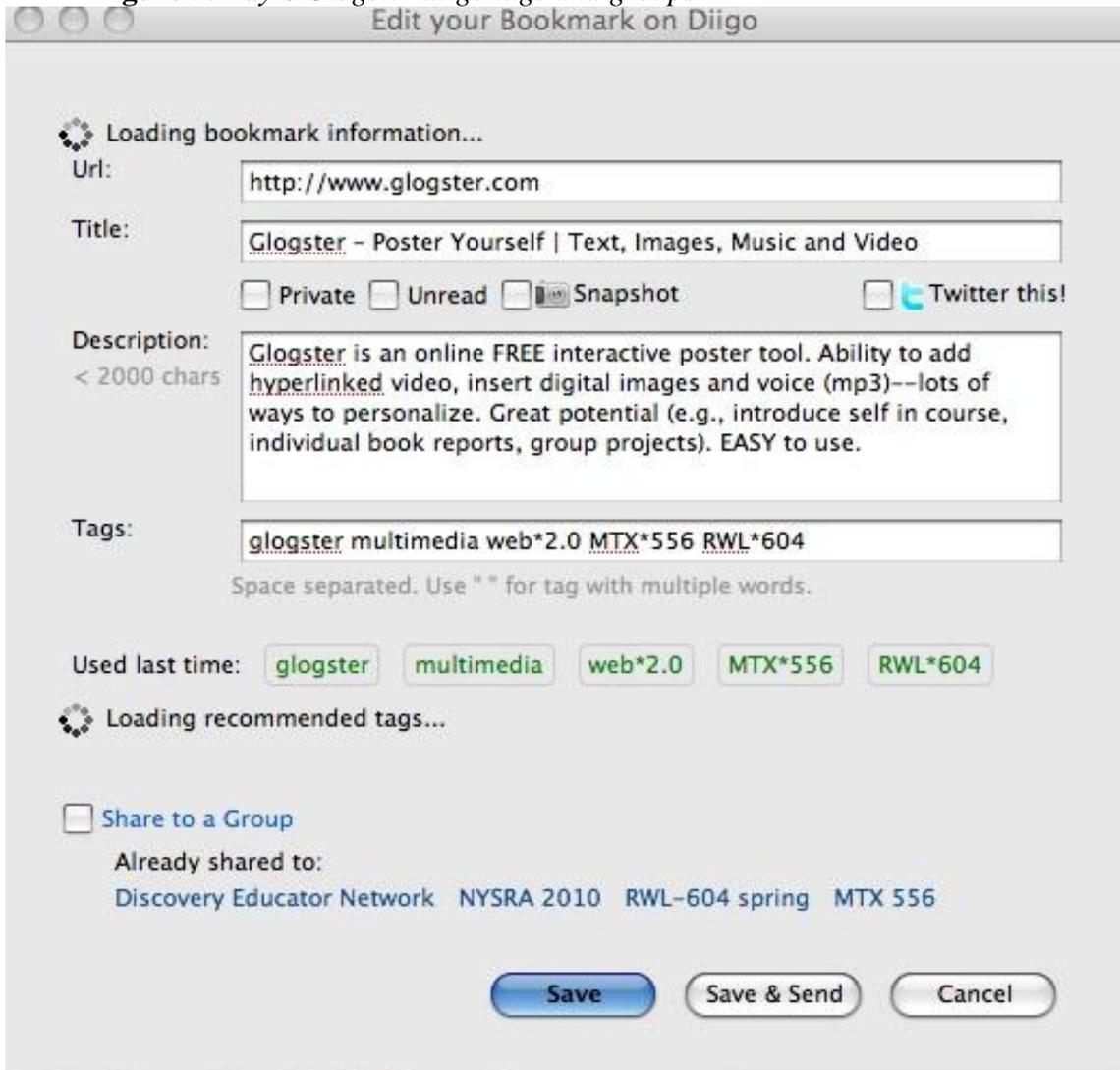**Figure 5:** *Kay's Glogster diigo tags and groups*

Figure 6: *Kay's diigo Groups Notified of her Annotation*

After she sent the website to her selected groups, diigo generates an email to all of the group members. The email contains her annotation (see figure 7). If she has a colleague who is not in her recipient list, she can send the colleague an email.

Figure 7: *Kay's NYSRA 2010 Email Notification of her Annotation*
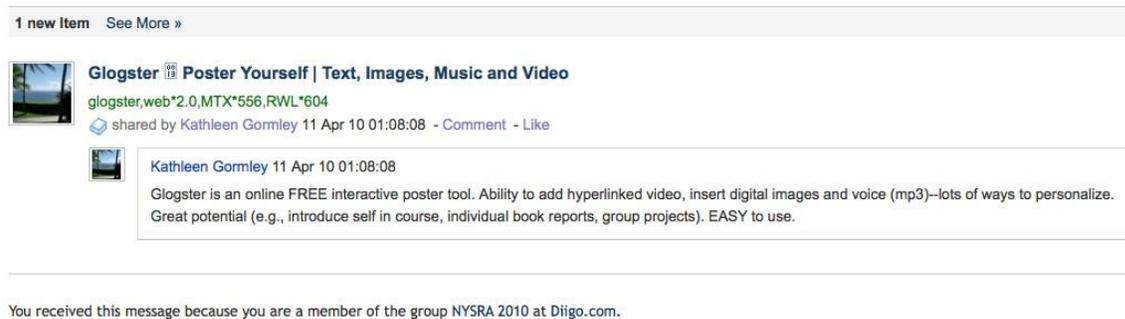
Kay also has the option of marking a bookmark as 'private.' In an online course she is currently taking, she is struggling a bit with html. So she located several sites that offer advice about how to use html codes, such as implementing the cascading system, into her online syllabus she plans to use. She is not very sure of herself at this point and worries that her annotations may not be quite on the mark. But by making the bookmarks private (See Figure 8 on next page), she can locate her 'html' tagged materials through diigo library and searching her tags of 'html' and 'accessibility'. That way, she is the only one who can 'see' her diigo annotations, highlighting or sticky notes.

A great feature of diigo is following other people. Kay can identify people whom she wants to follow. They are notified that she is following them. For example, each year she attends a technology conference. The conference hosts people who consistently make engaging presentations, and Kay enjoys following their bookmarks. She follows everything they bookmark—since they share similar interests in educational technology and digital literacy; moreover, one of them follows her in return and learns from her. There is someone she doesn't know from first-hand contact, but she likes all the Web2.0 tools he notes, so she follows him too. Once she indicated that she wanted to follow him, he immediately tapped her back and now follows her. Although she has never met him in person, he's become a virtual colleague for her.

Figure 8: *Kay's private annotation*

Socially constructed communities of learners such as these emerge with many connections and interconnections among the individuals. Figure 9 summarizes the people Kay follows and those who follow her.

Figure 9: Summary of *Kay's Followers and Those She Follows*

Figure 10 shows an example of Kay following her co-author and what he is currently bookmarking (Figure 11).

Figure 10: *Example of Kay following Peter*

Figure 11: *Peter's Recent Annotations*

There are many ways that diigo might be useful for teachers. Here we describe a few of these ideas:

1. ***Professional Study and Research***: Much like teacher book studies, professional groupings of educators can decide to study a particular topic (DesRoches, 2009). While doing independent reading and viewing in preparation for online interaction, diigo can be used to enhance professional book clubs in schools. Teachers can easily bookmark and tag related materials and websites to be shared with their group. We recommend the 'free' dim dim meetings available at http://www.dimdim.com/ for discussion of topics of shared interest.

2. ***Curriculum Development***: Social bookmarking can facilitate the identification of high quality websites for this purpose. For example, fourth grade educators interested in developing curriculum and identifying high quality websites on the Iroquois could bookmark their chosen websites with may tags, such as 'Iroquois', 'Seneca,' lifestyle, 'easy*read', 'video'. 'Easy*read' and 'video' might indicate that the reading requirements are less demanding for fourth graders and thus appropriate for students who struggle with reading or are English language learners.

3. ***Assigned Collaborative Group Work***: Teachers can group students for particular topics of research and send out bookmarked websites for their use—allowing students to select from among the choices. One advantage from the teacher's perspective is that the websites have been designated as trustworthy in terms of content and appropriateness, a fact that parents and principals may find reassuring. In addition, the difficulty level will have been considered as well as which multimedia options within the selections chosen might be more likely to engage learners.

4. ***Collaborative Group Research***: A teacher can set up groups of older students with similar interests and have them research a topic identifying particular websites

using their school emails (Forbes, 2004). The teacher can be an active participant making comments and providing feedback. If a learner bookmarks an unreliable resource, a discussion can occur about why a particular website/material is not the best choice. A good example is the well- known website about the tree octopus (http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/). It looks legitimate and reliable. It's only with guidance that students learn to recognize the lack of appropriateness of content. In such cases the teacher is the 'guide on the side' making sure learners are not side-tracked and are identifying reliable sources, making good use of tags for retrieval and annotating in clear, informative ways.

5. ***Challenging Gifted or Interested Learners***: Children with expertise in particular subject areas may be disinterested in grade level texts; diigo enables the teacher to send challenging and interesting websites and provide encouragement for exploration to such students. Conversations that spark and encourage learning and interaction are more likely to occur as a result.

6. ***Making Recommendations to Parents***: Many parents don't know how to encourage children to use websites for learning. A teacher might for example, want to bookmark Tumblebook Library (http://www.tumblebooks.com/library/asp/home_tumblebooks.asp). through the New York City Public library to alert parents of its benefits. Before diigo, one would have to go to the NYC Public Library home page, find 'Resources for Children', and search to find 'Tumblebook Library.' Instead by using diigo, the website can not only be bookmarked directly but the teacher can send annotations out to parents using the tag 'eBooks' or 'interactive*websites' for example. Similarly, teachers could suggest "Summer Fun" or "Avoiding Winter Doldrums" with the purpose of engaging learners in reading, writing and digital literacy activities.

7. **Book Recommendations**: There are many book recommendation websites, including NYSRA's Charlotte Award [http://www.nysreading.org/Awards/charlotte/], which features children's audio recommendations of the books being considered for the award. Spaghetti Club [http://www.spaghettibookclub.org/] and the LA Times [http://www.latimes.com/features/kids/readingroom/la-et-kidsun1apr01,0,2594278.story] have book reviews by children. We find that students very much like the Spaghetti Club because it is visually appealing and easy to navigate. Teachers can bookmark these on diigo so that when children are looking for good books, they can access the list of websites and be able to see what other children recommend.

8. **Online Book Groups for Students**: Ferriter (2010) notes the importance of making book clubs social. One online book club we have found that children enjoy is the Planet Book Club (http://www.planetbookclub.com/kids/booktalk.html).

The advent of the Internet means that teachers are no longer limited in what they read and with whom they connect. Through social bookmarking, teachers can organize themselves much

more professionally and connect directly with students more personally. The new Web 2.0 technologies are inherently social and provide easy access to most alphabetic and multimedia texts available in today's world. In particular, social bookmarking provides far greater ease of storing, retrieving, sharing and interacting with texts than ever before. Social bookmarking allows teachers to expand their learning communities and participate more personally with students in small groups. Teachers can now serve more as mentors and collaborators than a givers of information. Social bookmarking in general, and diigo in particular, has the potential to make learning more engaging. We trust that teachers will find this tool helpful in their own work - please follow us on our NYSRA diigo group to see how this social bookmarking site may benefit you (http://groups.diigo.com/group/nysra-2010). We welcome your participation!

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