Social Bookmarking as a Research Tool

One of the best ways for your research group to begin collecting and organizing information on the topic we are studying in class is to use a social bookmarking tool called Diigo (www.diigo.com). After your teacher creates student accounts for everyone in your class and introduces you to the basics of Diigo, use the following checklist to organize the work of your group.

1. Has your group brainstormed a list of common tags that you will use when bookmarking websites for your research project? Does every group member have a copy of this tag list?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

2. Does your group have an Original Thinker, who will bookmark at least twenty websites connected to your topic of study?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

3. Does your group have a Connector, who will identify and bookmark resources on secondary topics? (Example: *Life expectancy is a secondary topic for poverty.*)

   Your Response/Next Steps:

4. Does your group have a Johnny Opposite, who will ensure that the links you are collecting represent both sides of controversial topics?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

5. Does your group have a Reliability Cop, who will rate the overall value of *every* Web resource bookmarked based on how trustworthy it appears to be?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

6. Does your group have a Mind Reader, who will dig through the Diigo bookmark lists (www.diigo.com/list/home) searching for sites that may be useful in your research project?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

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7. Does your group have a Cleaning Crew, who will ensure that every link in your shared collection has tags and short descriptions?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

8. Has your group worked out a plan for communicating during your initial efforts to identify and bookmark sites for your research project?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

9. Will you use the Topic option in Diigo? If so, has a new strand been posted already?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

10. Has your group set a starting date and an ending date for researching that everyone can agree to?

    Your Response/Next Steps:

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Shared Annotation Checklist

Once your group has started a healthy collection of websites to explore for your research project, you can use the shared annotation features of Diigo (www.diigo.com) to take notes and wrestle with key ideas together. After your teacher has introduced social bookmarking and shared annotation to you, use the following checklist to organize and evaluate your shared annotation efforts.

1. Has your group used the social bookmarking feature of Diigo to create a healthy collection of websites to explore together?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

2. Does your group have a Captain Cannonball who will craft initial comments and add initial highlights to your collection of shared websites?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

3. Does your group have a Provocateur who will challenge the thinking of his/her peers in shared annotation conversations?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

4. Does your group have a Middle Man who will find common ground and draw conclusions based on the range of statements made in a shared annotation conversation?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

5. Does your group have an Author's Worst Nightmare who will challenge statements and ideas made by the authors of your articles?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

6. Does your group have a Repo Man who will create a list of summary statements at the end of a shared annotation conversation?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

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7. Do all of the comments in your shared conversation use proper annotation language? Are they proofread carefully? Do they begin with lead statements and end with questions? Do they demonstrate deep thinking? Do they add value to your studies?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

8. Have you created a plan for deleting highlights or annotations that are throwaways? How will you hold your peers accountable for posting quality thoughts to your conversation? For fulfilling their role in your shared annotation group?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

9. Has your group set a starting date and an ending date for commenting that everyone can agree to?

   Your Response/Next Steps:

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Reflecting on Diigo Annotations

One of the keys to really taking advantage of Diigo (www.diigo.com) as a student research tool is learning to make quality contributions to the conversations that your peers are having around articles. Use this handout—which includes a strand of conversation between sixth-grade students—to reflect on the characteristics of quality annotations and Diigo conversations. This strand addressed a current event article about a U.S. company's work in the South American country of Peru.

Original Text Highlight: U.S.-owned Doe Run Resources Corporation bought the smelter from the state in 1997 on the condition that it would reduce toxic emissions.

Comments Added to Highlight

- Interesting—this is another example of a US company owning a factory in South America. Remember that South American countries often have natural resources but they don't have the tools to do anything with those natural resources, so companies from countries like ours come in to do the work. So the question is should we feel bad about the fact that a US company is polluting heavily in Peru? (comment by William Ferriter)
- I think that we should feel bad for the fact that we're putting other children at risk so we can earn more money. Just because those children aren't our children, doesn't mean we shouldn't care about their health. Also, these factories emit lead into the air. So do you think it's ok for the U.S. to ban lead in our country, but then go and buy a factory that basically pumps lead into other children? Do you think it's fair that we're shortening these children's lives so our country can get more money? (comment by Caroline W)
- Caroline said: Do you think it's fair that we're shortening these children's lives so our country can get more money?

  Absolutly not! We have enough money already. As one of the wealthier countries in the world, we don't have the right to 'bully' the underdeveloped countries. We should be helping them not hurting them. If we want to make world peace, helping underdeveloped countries is a good start. The poor countries tend to fight more because they are in major need of money, natural resources, land, or something other than that. We also don't want the poor Peruvians to get mad at us. On the flip side, we are in an economic crisis. Do you think that the people leading the business need money or want to provide jobs. I still don't think that matters as much as helping out other countries. What do you think about this situation? (comment by Anna E)
- I think the people that lead the business don't really care about the health of the people in Peru, near the smelter. They probably only care that they get money from the job that it provides. If they did care, they wouldn't even be over there pumping lead into the air and peoples' bodies. The US banded this for a reason: it was harming the peoples' health that live around it. For us to go over there and do it to the people of Peru just isn't right. We already know what it does to our health and we don't care. Do you think the extra money for the US is worth harming other peoples' health? (comment by Kristen W)

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Questions for Reflection

1. What do you notice about each of these comments? Are there any shared strengths to the comments? Shared weaknesses? What impresses you? What turns you off?

2. What kinds of things do each of the participants in this conversation do to encourage their peers to share their thoughts? How important do you think that is for groups reflecting on articles together?

3. Which comment in this strand of conversation adds the most value to the thinking and work of the group? Why?

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Scoring Shared Annotation Efforts

Improving shared annotation efforts requires regularly reviewing the content that groups are creating together. Students and teachers alike can use the following rubric to judge the quality of the work done around any shared reading.

Above Average
The highlighting on this shared reading draws attention to ideas that are essential for this group's research efforts. There is no evidence of excessive highlighting or of decisions to spotlight unimportant information. This group does a great job using annotations to carry on a conversation with one another! Questions are asked and answered, ideas are raised and challenged, and new thinking is generated together. I'm impressed because the researchers used proper grammar and spelling in all situations, making it easy to understand their ideas. There weren't any places where I struggled to understand what annotations meant. *Overall, this shared annotation project was amazing! I learned a ton just by reading through the thoughts shared by the members of this group.*
Average
While this group has definitely highlighted valuable information, in places it was hard for me to sift through all of the highlights to figure out what exactly was important. Many of the annotations in this shared reading seem like first drafts to me. They include enough information to catch my attention, but not enough information to really make me think. What's more, I don't always understand how each annotation is going to help the researchers. There aren't enough conversations between researchers in the annotations around this shared reading. I see a lot of people doing a great job making their own thinking clear, but there aren't many questions being asked or answered. It just doesn't seem like the members of this research group are working with one another very well. One strength of this shared reading is that I had no trouble understanding the writing in any of the annotations added by researchers. Students used proper grammar and spelling in almost every situation—which meant that I knew exactly what they were trying to say even when I thought that they could have written more. *Overall, this shared annotation effort left me interested, but wanting to know more.*
Needs Improvement
I really struggled to understand the highlights added to this text. At times, there were entire paragraphs highlighted that didn't seem to have anything to do with the topic being researched. Other times, there were highlights that seemed important but there were no annotations to explain exactly why that text mattered. I was left guessing by a lot of the highlights on this reading.

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Most of the annotations in this shared reading were really disappointing. They rarely included enough detail for me to understand exactly what the research group was thinking. Worse yet, there were way too many playful annotations that weren't connected to the project that this group was working on. I'm not convinced that this group took the idea of shared reading seriously.

Worse yet, I'm not sure I saw any examples of meaningful conversations between researchers in the annotations around this reading. No one asked any really good questions or responded to the thoughts of their peers. When partners did interact with each other, their responses were too brief to be valuable for learning.

The quality of the grammar and spelling in this shared reading was also poor! There were way too many places where I had to work to understand exactly what student researchers were trying to say in their annotations.

Overall, this shared annotation effort left me frustrated and confused.

Questions for Reflection

1. If you had to defend the score that you've given this group, what evidence from their highlights and annotations would you use? Can you find any specific highlights and annotations that support your final rating?

2. Which individual members of this student research group made the most meaningful contributions to their team's efforts? What was it about their contributions that were impressive to you?

3. What specific suggestions for improvement would you make to the members of this student research group? How can they improve their shared annotation efforts?

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