

# TRAIL MIX: BUFFET STYLE OFFERINGS USING DELICIOUS BOOKMARKING

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## ABSTRACT

Use of tasty and truly delicious bookmarking to assist teacher education students in gathering resources on a level otherwise unavailable. Heavily season with equal parts collaboration, student engagement, and hard work. The Education Resource Finder can be found at: <http://delicious.com/eduWLUlibrarian>

## Main ingredients:

- 1 c. creativity
- 5 c. willingness to take on a long term project
- ½ c. technical savvy
- 2 tbs student-oriented service philosophy
- 2 pinches children's books and curriculum awareness

## INTRODUCTION

Traditional cataloguing of library materials is limited in how in-depth subject headings can realistically be and practice has proven that subject description decided upon by non-practitioners can serve to obscure rather than assist with providing access to great materials. In many cases, broad or general subject headings are selected such as in the following case of the topic “teaching fractions”:

- Mathematics – Study and Teaching;
- Geometry, Plane – Study and Teaching;
- Ratio and Proportion – Study and Teaching; and
- Arithmetic – Study and Teaching.

Teacher education students at Wilfrid Laurier University, in Waterloo Ontario in Canada, are sent on practicum placement two days each week and are on increased length placements throughout the academic year. As the new Education Librarian, I was very surprised to find how difficult it was to locate curriculum related materials given my students’ specific needs (teaching math (fractions) to Grade 2) using our library catalogue. Furthermore, students were really interested in a variety of types of material for they would often ask: “What material do you have on the topic of “X”?” It became evident that the actual format of the materials needed to enhance their teaching a topic was of secondary or relative unimportance, which unfortunately remains how we continue to organize and offer our resources on our library homepage (<http://library.wlu.ca>), using the traditional access points of books (catalogue), and journal articles (databases).

As a result of discussions with the Education Library Associate and my own previous experience using a freely available social bookmarking software, delicious (<http://delicious.com>), an education-based resource finder was created to assist in gathering and locating materials. Just some of the varieties of materials we offer to teacher education candidates include manipulatives (games, puzzles, realia, and toys), storybooks for reading, curriculum materials such as books about how to teach fractions to Grade 2 students, and a myriad of great web resources and online lesson-plans. The Education Resource Finder has transformed student access to the wide

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range of materials, promoted active engagement, and encouraged library use of education materials available at Laurier's library.

## HOW WE DID IT

The first step in creating the Education Resource Finder involved quite a bit of deliberation and thought. Attempting this process with a fully developed or large collection would not likely be a good option because of the workload involved, but because our collection was new and thus still relatively small, I felt it worth the time and effort involved in order to provide not just good but excellent service to our students. In addition, we anticipate budget cuts in the coming years so keeping up with entering new items should not be too onerous or taxing.

We developed tag bundles that reflected the course names (and subject areas) taught at the Faculty of Education during the current year (2008-2009).

Arts  
Diversity  
Health and Phys Ed  
Language  
Learning and Child Development  
Mathematics  
School and Society  
Science  
Social Studies  
Technology

More tag bundles can be added as more courses are included in the curriculum, something we anticipated as we expanded from K through Grade 6 teaching certification to K through Grade 10 for the upcoming fall semester (Fall 2009). Unfortunately, tagging an item in our library catalogue has not been quite as easy as anticipated because we have links to many subscriptions (journals and e-books) which require authentication to use. As a result, manipulation of the URL to include forcing the user through our proxy server if coming from off-campus made the entire process much more time consuming and labourious than first anticipated.

Pasting a manipulated URL into the bookmark for each item and attempting to copy the contents notes from as many resources as possible, we added most of our manipulative and media collection to the finder first; they were both small collections and my associate was willing to handle those items. The decision on which tags to use continues to evolve even today, for many of the terms students use to ask for subjects are not expressed well, if at all, in subject headings; two examples: word walls and book clubs in school libraries. The Education Associate has her own unique delicious account, which I have access to as well, and I import her bookmarks on a monthly

or bi-weekly basis by exporting her items and importing them into my file, omitting duplicate items. One of the pitfalls of this compilation process is that if I edit her tags to match mine, then the import doesn't recognize the change as duplication.

We recognized early on that in order to offer the widest range of access points we needed to include tags for format, grade level, and the type of miscellaneous topics that teachers encounter under the guise of "classroom management". As a result, we created the tag bundle "For Teachers", which includes such tags as:

*active\_learning, administration, assessment, assistive\_technology, authentic\_learning, best\_practice, censorship, cognition, community, critical\_thinking, curriculum, diversity, EBL, effective\_teaching, evaluation, group\_work, harassment, jobs, learning\_environment, lesson\_planning, methodology, motivation, new\_teachers, pedagogy, professional\_development, psychology, reference, reflective\_practice, report\_cards, reproducibles, research, rubrics, safety, standardized\_testing, stress, teacher\_handbooks, time\_management, visual\_display, web2.0, webcasts, whiteboards*

which really didn't fit in traditional subject areas but rather were more related to 'about teaching' than what to teach.

Establishing some type of identifier for type of material, such as the distinction between curriculum books and websites, while not critical was deemed useful, so a series of title tags were used- notably WEB for websites, BOOK for children's stories, MEDIA, PICTURE, KIT, amongst others. Part of the rationale for this was so that students could identify when they needed to come to the library to retrieve material and where it might be located. Our posters, kits, children's books and curriculum materials while all within a small area in the library are shelved independently.

At the beginning of setting up our delicious bookmarks, we included tags for specific grades, but quickly realized that a lesson plan or book targeting for example, Grade 2 students could easily be adapted to Grade 1 or Grade 3. As a result, the singular grade levels were altered to include broader levels, so that materials now read kindergarten, primary\_level, junior\_level, intermediate\_level, and at some point in the future we'll probably be adding senior level too.

## IS IT WORKING?

Javascript coding provides the ability for me to post tag clouds on my library webpage ([http://library.wlu.ca/subject/education/resource\\_finder/science](http://library.wlu.ca/subject/education/resource_finder/science)) which means students can choose from established tags, and not have to guess at the vocabulary, which so often derails the research process. Suggestions for alternative tags, bundles and taxonomy is very welcome, and I do tend to add as many tags as possible, but given our students' inclination to browse they should happen upon the tag they need to use. The tags

themselves do not always reflect the subject headings chosen by our cataloguing department.

Feedback from students and faculty has been very positive so far, and they are clearly anxious for more books and curriculum materials to be added as soon as we can get to them. One of our summer projects this year will be to add the other materials in the children's books, and curriculum collection. Because we have just added the Grade 7-10 curriculum to our course offerings, those materials purchased in late winter will be arriving soon and will need to be entered.

## **ROADBLOCKS**

There have been some significant roadblocks along the way:

- in the middle of our entry process, we realized that because our catalogue was being migrated using a discovery layer interface, we were unsure of the permanent URL for items at the library
- and at time of press have yet to find out if a decision has been made about what that address might be, so adding new library items had to be halted
- as with all cataloguing endeavours authority control over tags is an ongoing challenge. The delicious software has the convenient ability to change, bulk edit or convert tags
- probably the greatest obstacle to overcome is the time factor involved in hand entering each and every URL and tag for library materials. Though it is a slow and meticulous process, for a subject area new to the librarian it is a fabulous way to learn what is in the collection and what to recommend to students when they come by asking for "stuff on weather."

## **THE FUTURE**

The nature of teacher education is such that delicious bookmarking is very useful so that my students can find materials by grade, format, and subject area or any or all of these criteria, but for many subject areas, traditional cataloguing will more than suffice. It seems to me that reinventing the wheel is unnecessary in the teaching profession- we need to openly share our lesson plans, ideas, and recommended sources and support all new teachers in establishing their careers using our discipline's best practices.

Plans are being made to share our delicious resource finder with local school boards, practicing teachers, and anyone else interested in this type of resource.

## **CONCLUSION**

Delicious social bookmarking is a fine example of Web 2.0 technology because it fosters increasingly necessary and truly collaborative projects, particularly important in times of

diminishing budget and resource allocations. As an added bonus it promotes collaboration, and encourages student life-long learning. It also aids students by reinforcing their connection with the university as graduates are welcome to use the resource finder at any time during their teaching careers. As a dedicated life-long learner, I can only hope they will endeavour to share their own recipes for successful teaching with what is, in effect, a worldwide educational community.

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