

What's mine is yours: achieving curricular co-construction with students using delicious

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In a moment of weakness brought on by the type of procrastination that only comes at the end of the semester, I recently took a Facebook quiz entitled “What type of Librarian are you?” The answer: Librarian 2.0. Although I consider myself to be a progressive, technologically-minded librarian, I was surprised. Really? 2.0? So, I’m not an archivist or a law librarian at heart? Was it because I had answered the tattoo location question with “wrist”? Or because I had said my dream car was a hybrid? Regardless, it made me evaluate myself in such an unexpected way that I really had to stop and think what I had ever done that could possibly define me as a “Librarian 2.0,” apart from social networking, which is as much about my personal self as my librarian self. As an instruction librarian of ten years, I must certainly have *some* chops at using 2.0 tools! Then I remembered a teaching experience I had last semester that was one of the most fun and fulfilling of them all: introducing delicious (delicious.com), the social bookmarking site, to a class of Gender Studies majors to be used as a vehicle for the creation of their own index of scholarly materials in preparation for researching a final paper. Perhaps this is where I developed my Librarian 2.0 “roots”, without even realizing it.

The Course Assignment & Learning Outcomes

G300 Core Concepts and Key Debates in Gender Studies, is an intensive writing course that acts as the gateway to the major for students in their third undergraduate year at Indiana University. Students in G300 explore a series of themes through which gender is analyzed and defined by reading, research, and writing projects, as well as in-class discussion. I had the privilege to aid in assignment design for G300 in order to ensure the full integration of information literacy into learning outcomes, specifically based on Standard 3 (i.e., information evaluation) and 4 (i.e., information use) of ACRL’s Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Both the instructor and I agreed that we would like to see students thinking more deeply about the information they read for class and that one way to do this might be to have them choose outside sources and connect them with the course readings. The instructor wanted students to get the sources “talking to each other”, in other words, to discover how ideas and knowledge are connected. Ultimately, we hoped that encouraging students to engage in this type of thinking would lead them to ask new, more in-depth kinds of questions in preparation for their research essays. The following course assignment was designed to prepare students for their final essay:

Secondary Scholarship Exercise: Each student finds and posts on our course management system, OnCourse, one (unique) scholarly article relating to Herzog’s *Sex in Crisis* (bring a hard copy of the article to class). Students consult with Carrie Donovan during article selection. Students write a one-page justification for their selection in terms of relevance, authorship, and perspective. In class, students will reflect on the research process and collectively construct a keyword index for the class source collection.

Setting the Stage

As the Gender Studies Librarian, I visited the G300 class of sixteen students on three occasions to provide library instruction. The first library instruction session related to primary sources: how to locate them and how to use them as a catalyst for researching, writing, and analyzing course texts. The second library instruction session was focused on discussions of scholarship and identifying scholarly perspectives in Gender Studies, primarily through journal indexes. Once the students had this foundation for understanding information sources, they were prepared to create their own scholarly index by my third visit to the class at the end of the semester. In preparation for this session, each student had found a scholarly article and posted it to OnCourse so that I could confirm its quality and relevance in advance of the next class session. Upon confirming the articles satisfied the requirements of the assignment, I added the title and persistent URL of each student’s article to the delicious site for G300 that I had created (<http://delicious.com/g300>). Delicious is useful in this way, as I can save all of these articles online (“bookmark” them) and share them for others to see. Each bookmarked site is effectively like a simplified catalog/database entry, with a title, a link to the actual file/website, along with an option to describe the bookmark by adding an abstract (“notes”) and keywords (“tags”). Each student then brought a printed copy of his or her article to class on the day of the final library instruction session.

TAG! You’re it.

When I met with the students, we discussed the types of resources that are best used for identifying scholarly sources, including proprietary tools, such as the Gender Studies Database. I conducted a search on a topic familiar to the class in that database, selected one result, and identified

the various elements of the article record. After reviewing the rationale for categorizing and organizing information by these elements, I asked students to look at their own articles and to identify the items needed to make a database record for each one. Our conversation then moved into the topic of labeling content with subject headings and keywords. Students took several minutes to circle keywords in their article and also to identify larger concepts that could be used to describe the article's content. After sharing with a partner and getting feedback, I told them that they were prepared to construct their own index of sources using the articles they had selected and I showed them the delicious site I had created. To my surprise, not a single student was familiar with delicious! Since we did not have enough time during the class session to add every student's tags to their articles in delicious, I asked for two volunteers to add their keywords to their particular article, thereby making it searchable within the G300 delicious site.

An Index of Their Own

Through this in-class demonstration, the students were able to see the process of social tagging, as well as the benefits. By the following week, each student had tagged his or her article with the keywords they had identified in order to create an index of librarian-approved, scholarly articles that would be useful to any G300 student preparing for the course's final writing assignment. While I had envisioned this exercise as one that would help students understand the construction of proprietary database so that they could become better searchers in these environments, the outcomes were much more nuanced. The exercise also became one of understanding findability and labeling aboutness (i.e., the essence of the information). This is very difficult for novice researchers to do, especially when they are first engaging in a research topic in the scholarly arena. However, I think it is important to encourage this type of deep reading and thinking among undergraduates, especially within the context of information evaluation, as it will ease their transition into the communities of research practice defined by their chosen field of study.

Results

Out of the sixteen students in the class who submitted a one-page reflection paper justifying the selection of their article, all but four identified elements of authorship, perspective, and relevance to the course reading (Herzog's *Sex in Crisis*) that would be the centerpiece of their final essay. These remaining four students did not grasp the notion of perspective, but had a good understanding of the other two

evaluative criteria. Reviewing the essays allowed me to assess the effectiveness of my teaching regarding the identification of scholarly sources and the students' understanding of the important elements for recognizing scholarship in Gender Studies. During an end-of-semester focus group, G300 students were asked how they would seek out information on their own next time, without the help of a librarian. Many students indicated the usefulness of the Gender Studies Database for locating information and three students commented on delicious, saying:

"I love delicious!"

"I didn't know about delicious, it's really cool."

"I will definitely use delicious for my own personal stuff, too."

In addition, the faculty member for the course was pleased that the students had participated in co-construction of their own learning, as facilitated through the use of delicious. In an end-of semester interview, she commented: "I wanted them to focus on in-depth engagement with a few difficult readings and I think we achieved that especially brilliantly on the class archive of scholarly sources. That was a highpoint of the course."

Reflection

Could I have designed and implemented this assignment without delicious? Yes, I suppose I could have created a web site or course guide that would have allowed students to construct their own index and add tags to it; however, the time and resources required probably would have prohibited me from doing so. By using delicious, I have introduced students to an already available, free, and useful tool, while also allowing them to build their own collection of scholarship for themselves and their fellow classmates.

Even if I had only one class meeting for library instruction, as opposed to three, delicious could still be an effective tool to demonstrate interactively how information is organized in other, non 2.0 databases, from ABI/Inform to Academic Search Premier. Although one-shot sessions often focus on the access and use of library resources, that precious time with students might be better spent demystifying library databases and helping to create an understanding of how these resources are constructed. I think students who learn what goes into developing and organizing a database during a library instruction session would spend their time

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they've learned, not just recite a list of rules for composing a good search strategy.

Two of the principles cleared up a nagging question I had about some tutorials I'd seen. When watching a tutorial that presented a picture or a table with an audio narration accompanied by the same text on screen, I often felt slightly impatient; thus I would often go to the next slide before the audio narration finished, once I'd read all the screen text. I always felt a little guilty about this—was I shortchanging myself of the full learning experience simply because I read the text faster than the narrator could read it? I had heard good reasons elsewhere for including both written and audio explanations—to accommodate different learning styles, for example, or to assist learners challenged in seeing or hearing. Colvin Clark and Mayer devote two chapters to explaining that first, if only one these modes is used to explain a graphic or an animation, more learning is likely to occur through audio explanation rather than on-screen text; second, the presence in such situations of both written and audio explanations on a slide can significantly interfere with the learning process. Instead, they recommend in the most common circumstances to present a screen graphic illustrating the lesson (i.e., not the complete, on-screen text of the audio), accompanied by audio narration for the best learning gains.

Instruction librarians will likely already know about tutorials already in existence, such as TILT (<http://tilt.lib.utsystem.edu/>), the tutorials in ACRL's PRIMO database (<http://www.ala.org/apps/primo/public/search.cfm>), the many useful ANTS tutorials ([\[ants.wetpaint.com\]\(http://ants.wetpaint.com\)\), as well as the collection of tutorial resources available through LOEX \(<http://www.emich.edu/public/loex/resources.php>\). There are excellent examples to choose from, but these examples are many, and use a variety of instructional techniques. Looking at all of them to discern the best principles of e-learning creation would be next to impossible. Guidelines such as the ACRL Instructional Technologies Committee's Tips for Developing Effective Web-Based Library Instruction \(<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/is/committees/instrtech.cfm>\) and William Badke's guidelines for ANTS tutorials \(<http://www.acts.twu.ca/lbr/antsguidelines2008.htm>\) are also useful and worth a look, but these are higher-level guidelines that do not have the amount of detail and support found in Colvin Clark and Mayer's book.](http://</p>
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What this book shows is that we can do specific things with our video tutorials to ensure that we maximize learning for our students. A lot of things are out of our control—the physical conditions under which our tutorials are viewed, the student's attitude, level of interest, and attention span, whether or not students watch a video all the way to the end. Ensuring the educational value of a video, however, is within our control. By using these research-based guidelines, we can, for example, make a video that is short (thus minimizing the attention-span problem) and does not contain any extraneous elements such as background music or gratuitous animation. We know from reading this book that something we include in a video because we think it will “add interest” may in fact detract so greatly from the learning goals that the student may not learn anything at all. We now know to choose only those elements that contribute directly to learning.

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after the session searching more wisely and with a greater appreciation of the containers of scholarly information that libraries offer. A one-shot session featuring the use of delicious could still begin with a library database, but would then lead students into the practice of information selection and content tagging, whether in their own delicious site or one created for the entire class. By experiencing this process of constructing a collection of information, students will develop more advanced ways of thinking about information access and use, thereby empowering them to be thoughtful and aware participants in the scholarly research enterprise.

For students involved in researching and learning in their particular area of study, be it Gender Studies or English or another field, this type of interaction with information is crucial. It allows an understanding of the democratic nature of information and the power afforded by its effective searchability, availability, and dissemination. Beyond that, introducing students to a freely available tool like delicious that allows tracking and organizing of information is a bonus.

Based on this experience with delicious, I should be satisfied with the Librarian 2.0 moniker. But ultimately, it was not the technological tool that brought about the design of this assignment; instead, it was my hope that the students have a better understanding of the nature of scholarly information, regardless of the technologies they use to access it, collect it, or label it.