

Chapter 14

Using Social Bookmarking to Make Online Resources More Accessible

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ABSTRACT

There are a multitude of high-quality Web-based resources available for teachers to use with students across the curriculum. Having a systematic way to store, categorize, and share those resources with learners is critical. This is particularly true for students with learning disabilities for whom the task of searching through the vast array of online content to find relevant information can be quite daunting. This review looks at Diigo® (<http://www.diigo.com/>), a social bookmarking tool, and the affordances it provides for teachers trying to make online content more accessible for students with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The seemingly limitless amount of information on the World Wide Web is both a blessing and a curse. It is undeniable that we now have more information available at the click of a mouse than we could have ever imagined, but the task of weeding through that information and making sense of it presents a significant challenge for Web

users of all ages. Most keyword searches result in hundreds of thousands of websites spread across numerous pages sprinkled with enticing ads that all serve to distract the learner from the task at hand. This is particularly overwhelming for students with learning disabilities as they try to decipher search results, weed through websites, and identify relevant and credible information. One way to support students as they access information online is through the use of social bookmarking tools such as Diigo® (<http://www.diigo.com/>).

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Social bookmarking is a process whereby you save websites to a web archive that is accessible on any Internet enabled device. This archive can be shared with individuals or groups so that others have access to the websites you bookmark. This process is in contrast to the traditional method of bookmarking a website on an individual computer where it is only accessible to a single user on the specific computer where it was first saved. As the following review will demonstrate, Diigo allows you to do far more than just save and share websites with others. It has a wide range of tools and features that make it useful when working with K-12 students.

DIIGO OVERVIEW

To simply call Diigo® a social bookmarking tool is understating the range of power and features this technology has to offer. The goal of the Diigo developers, as stated on their homepage, is to create the ultimate online information management tool and they are well on their way to doing that. In addition to being able to save websites, Diigo allows you to add comments, descriptions, and tags to each site. You can also annotate sites with a highlighter tool or sticky notes as a way to draw attention to specific content. The best way to learn about the wide range of features Diigo has to offer is by watching the brief video tour on their homepage (<http://www.diigo.com/index>). The following sections highlight how specific features can be used to support K-12 students with learning disabilities as they access online information.

Diigo Educator Accounts

Diigo® educator accounts (<http://www.diigo.com/education>) are free and available to any K-12 or post-secondary educator. With an educator account teachers can sign-up an entire class of students easily and without having to provide e-mail ad-

resses for each student. Students within a given class are automatically added to a common group, which allows them to share saved websites with each other quickly and easily. Since bookmarked sites are attributed to the user who saved them, teachers can easily identify students who decide to share inappropriate sites with the group. The teacher retains the authority to delete student accounts as well as any site added by a student. Privacy settings on student accounts restrict them from becoming members with users from outside their assigned classroom meaning that students can only interact with peers from their own class. The Diigo educator account makes it easy for teachers and students to work together to collaboratively build an archive of relevant websites that can be easily accessed and modified by any member of the group.

Bookmarking Sites

At its core, Diigo® is a bookmarking tool that allows users to save websites to the “cloud” so that they can later access those sites from a wide-range of devices. When you save a site you also have the option of writing a description or summary of the site that can serve as a reminder to you and as a helpful synopsis to others, such as your students, who may view the site. Diigo also makes it possible to categorize saved sites making it easier to keep track of a large collection of sites within a single archive. For instance, you can add keyword tags to each site making it possible to search and sort an entire library of sites by those tags. A website about the planet Saturn could be tagged with words such as planets, solar system, and outer space. These tags can be helpful to students trying to sort through a large library of saved sites as they make it possible to quickly narrow down the collection to just those sites with the relevant tag.

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