

Primary source repositories, inquiry-based learning and social bookmarking

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Also available at:	http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/projects/building-primary-source-repositories-online-a-scoping-exercise/
Further information:	Project news: http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/news/ J Wood (2011): Helping students to become disciplinary researchers using questioning, social bookmarking and inquiry-based learning, <i>Practice and Evidence of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education</i> , 6.1, 3-26 [online at https://www.academia.edu/689002/Helping_Students_to_Become_Disciplinary_Researchers_Using_Questioning_Social_Bookmarking_and_Inquiry-Based_Learning] Case studies available here (JISC): https://www.academia.edu/1735599/JISC case studies of my teaching

Background

- Social bookmarking is a way for users to save, manage and share websites with one another (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_bookmarking). A number of lecturers have experimented with its use in higher education, but it is still far from well-known (see Wood, 2011 for some examples).
- Student use of the Internet in History and other Humanities disciplines can often be problematic and new pedagogic approaches are increasingly being developed to take account of this fact. Simply warning students not to use Wikipedia or other websites that staff judge to be inappropriate plainly does not work, for example, despite the frequency with which the point has been and still is reiterated to students.
- In developing the projects outlined below, we aimed to use social bookmarking to promote active student engagement with the Internet as a site for conducting research and refining digital literacy skills in searching for, evaluating and using information

online.

- In addition we wanted to use social bookmarking to provide History students with access to the increasing number of primary sources that are available online. A first step was to conduct a survey of the materials that were already out there and the various approaches that had been taken to encouraging students to use them.

Description of pedagogical approach

- A variety of approaches have been adopted in our projects, but they all involve encouraging students to engage actively with the Internet as a source of primary research in History through the use of social bookmarking.
- The most open and inquiry-based form is described in full in Wood (2011: see appendix for full details of weekly activities). In this approach, students constructed annotated resource lists based on online resources that they had found relating to the weekly topic of study and shared them with one another using the social bookmarking service, Diigo (<https://www.diigo.com/>). Students also had to post weekly questions based on their reading to a forum within Diigo in order to reinforce their engagement with the material and to provide relevant topics for discussion in the seminars. Lecturers in History at Liverpool John Moores University and Modern Languages (Spanish) at Sussex University are experimenting further with this approach to Diigo at the moment (January-April 2014) as part of a mini-HEA funded project (<http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/projects/tl-tagging-and-learning/>).
- As part of this project, we are also encouraging a small number of students at Lincoln to use Diigo to support their independent research in preparation for assessed work (essays and dissertations). The students will prepare short reflective pieces on the strengths and weaknesses of Diigo as a tool for supporting independent student research.
- For another small HEA-funded project, we have deployed another social bookmarking tool called Scoop.it! (<http://www.scoop.it/>) to support student inquiry online. Scoop.it! enables users to 'curate' the web by creating 'magazines' that showcase their specific interests. An interesting feature of Scoop.it! is that it allows users to rate websites that have been curated and there is thus considerable scope for developing digital literacy by encouraging students to evaluate the usefulness of specific websites (which can then be used as a basis for discussion in class).
- Use of Scoop.it! is less well developed than Diigo, but we have plans for utilising it in a number of different ways, including:
 - Staff create resource lists and collating resources that can be presented to students and into which they can conduct research (and or rate the websites);
 - Students curate their own Scoop.it! magazine around a specific topic, either individually or collaboratively, and to share it with the class;
 - Staff or students collate a Scoop.it! magazine based on a specific type of source (e.g. films/ photos);
 - Students could be asked to collate a small Scoop.it! magazine to accompany standard essays (or annotated bibliographies/ literature reviews) in order to encourage them to engage actively with Internet sources when researching,

thereby foregrounding to some extent inquiry work that is often 'hidden' from the assessor;

- Staff or students find and curate a Scoop.it! magazine that only includes 'bad' or low-quality sources, thereby improving digital information literacy through a process of 'reverse engineering'.

Reflections and lessons learnt

- Social bookmarking has strong potential to give students access to resources and to developing their (inquiry) skills in the use of the Internet as a research tool. It can give them a better sense of the online landscape of their discipline.
- It can be used to support both pedagogies that range from directive and transmission-focused modes (e.g. providing students with lists of materials gathered online in one social bookmarking service) to more open and student-led approaches (e.g. students find materials and construct their own resource lists). We have listed suggestions about all of these possible approaches above.
- More open forms of social bookmarking inquiry are useful in terms of developing students' confidence in working independently, in finding and assessing the usefulness of information and in their conceptions of the nature of information in the discipline (e.g. Wood, 2011 suggests that through the structured use of social bookmarking in their independent work, students really started to understand the nature of primary sources within the discipline).
- There are a lot of primary source repositories out there, as well as individual databases and other source collections. But they are of varying quality and are not necessarily maintained on a regular basis. More effort could be made to update these and bring them together. This was too big a task for our project, but a process of mapping the information landscape in History is one from which all within the Humanities disciplines could benefit. If such a task were to be carried out, we would suggest, given our experiences, that this process was tied in some way into student work in the curriculum. At the very least, students should be 'consumers' of this work and, we would hope, could even make a valuable and active contribution to the task.
- The Scoop.it! tool is not without its limitations. While it is visually appealing (more so than Diigo, perhaps) and easy-to-use, the search functions within it are undeveloped and a lot of scrolling is needed to look through the webpages that have been marked (once you have more than a few dozen or so). It should also be noted that in order to use the full functionality of the service, a fee must be paid. Future projects might look at developing a free-to-use tool with similar functionality.
- A centralised repository (or series of repositories) of primary sources is desirable and would effectively tie together work done on this and other projects. Given the amount of work that has been done on Open Access repositories for secondary sources, some thought might be given to applying that learning to the sharing, maintenance and updating of similar primary source repositories.