

All Together Now

Social bookmarking offers a new way to store and share Web sites

WE'VE ALL HEARD ABOUT WIKIS, BLOGS, AND RSS FEEDS. NOW THERE'S another hot Web-based tool for classroom use. It's called social bookmarking. Don't worry, it's not like MySpace, Friendster, or other social networking sites that have come under fire for exposing kids to unsafe Internet practices.

Social bookmarking allows multiple users to save their favorite sites, articles, and even podcasts on the Web—instead of inside your browser—making them accessible from home, school, the library, or anywhere with Internet access. It's quickly becoming a popular way for teachers and students to store, classify, share, and search links, all of which are gathered by many users.

How can school librarians use this collaborative tool? The wonderful thing about bookmarks is that you can share them with just about anybody who has access to a shared username and password. And librarians and teachers can tailor bookmarks to meet a classroom's curricular and research needs.

I showed high school teachers the benefits of social bookmarking during a workshop last year—and they loved incorporating it into their lessons. To get started, register at one of the many social bookmarking sites, such as www.furl.net or del.icio.us. You can store your bookmarks at these sites, or if you prefer, download the bookmarking tool Scuttle (sourceforge.net/projects/scuttle) on your school's server.

Bookmarks are created by using tags, which are one-word descriptors or phrases that you assign to the various sites. For example, for my first collaborative effort, I worked with the theater arts teacher to create a list of Web sites for an assignment about Anton Chekhov. Together, we decided on the types of sites we wanted to include (educational institutions, government agencies, and national organizations), and then we narrowed down the tags to describe the sites we found ("Three Sisters" and "Russian drama," for instance). Students later accessed the bookmarks by searching the tags we gave them. Kids were also encouraged to bookmark other sites they found, further expanding the bookmark collection the teacher and I had created.

For another project, I helped a biology class research endangered species. While searching for sites on their assigned species, kids discovered other links that were useful

to their classmates, so they bookmarked and tagged those sites with the phrase "species at risk," creating a list of additional resources. I also introduced bookmarking to a ninth-grade health teacher who wanted to

build a collection of sex education resources. This gave me the opportunity to teach a lesson on Web-site evaluation, in which I explained how to validate the author's credentials and to establish the authority of the organization that published the page. We also discussed ways to check for objectivity, currency, and accuracy. Now a link to that bookmark collection, which includes a list of relevant sites that have been reviewed, evaluated, and recommended for students by students, is on our library Web site.

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Bookmarks are great for research assignments because they keep all of your relevant online materials in one place. Del.icio.us offers an MP3+podcast tag combination, which also allows users to post their own podcasts and then create RSS feeds. Planning a school trip? Save links to hotels, activities, and transportation by using tags such as "travel" and "school trip." You can even include interesting bookmarks on your blog. Teachers and students use the tool to tag interesting reviews to recommend books and DVDs for the library.

Several teachers in our high school have incorporated this tool into their assignments, and since we've written social bookmarking into our ninth-grade information literacy skills continuum, all students in that grade will be taught how to use it as part of their research assignments.

Social bookmarking has become an integral part of our library program. Research is more collaborative and students are more diligent about evaluating resources because they know their peers will be using them.

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