Chapter 15

Diigo, Collaborative Knowledge Acquisition, and Social Networks of Graduate–Level Coursework

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers description and reflexive insight into the multiple ways the authors has used Diigo as a collaborative learning tool in courses associated with the Master's of Arts Management degree program at the University of Oregon. The author discusses the particular attributes of the Diigo platform when it comes to finding, sharing, and collectively exploring online resources, paying close attention to where Diigo sits on the landscape of social networking sites. Drawing on a handful of examples across two graduate-level classes, the author also details the kinds of assignments and pedagogical strategies into which the author has woven Diigo as a collaborative tool. The chapter concludes with a critical assessment of the ways in which Diigo resonates with ideas of networked learning by foregrounding collaboration and participation in educational settings.

INTRODUCTION

Participation and collaboration are ubiquitous terms when it comes to discussing current environments of digital communication tools and technologies. In this chapter, I explore these terms in light of graduate course work that draws heavily on Diigo, a web-based social bookmarking service. Diigo allows users to store bookmarks through a cloud-based system, such that these resources are available from any computer or device with a web connection; Diigo also facilitates social networking around a user's resources through features such as sharing, following, and annotating,

thus operating as a social network site (albeit in a mode distinct from other popular sites, such as Facebook). Anchored at the intersection of critical discussions about participatory culture, social networks, and the future or learning institutions by scholars such as Henry Jenkins, danah boyd, Cathy Davidson, and Caroline Haythornwaite, the chapter examines my experiences as a faculty member by weaving critical reflection on pedagogy into academic theory and debate about the digital landscape within which education happens. My goal in this chapter is two-fold: to describe use of a particular social network site in graduate-level courses, and then to articulate an approach to graduate education that is collaborative and participatory when it comes to knowledge acquisition, generation, and sharing.

BACKGROUND

Understanding the social classroom in terms of integrating media, networks, and technologies entails grappling with what is known as participatory culture (more broadly) and participatory learning (more specifically). In this chapter, I seek to navigate the intersections of "participatory" and "social" as manifest in my use of a particular tool (Diigo) as a platform for collaborative knowledge acquisition in graduate education. By "collaborative knowledge acquisition" I refer to collective and peer-driven gathering, annotating, and analyzing of resources: academic articles, case studies, tools, technologies, opinion pieces, video material, etc. This collaborative collecting and interpreting does not rely on traditional hierarchical or authoritative structures of higher education—the model of instructor providing access to knowledge—but instead draws on the notion that all participants in an advanced graduate course can (and should) contribute to the learning that occurs.

A relatively recent site or tool, Diigo represents the emergence of "social bookmarking sites" (SBS), online platforms and tools that allow users to gather, organize, and share internet resources. Due to the collaborative potential of SBSs, and Diigo in particular, these sites have received attention from academics and practitioners alike with regards to research and critical commentary. Estellés, del Moral Peréz, and González offered a survey of SBSs with a specific emphasis on Diigo, noting that the site is a 'metacognitive tool' that facilitates collaborative learning and research in a way that "displays different ways to learn, think, and build knowledge" (2010, p. 189). Focusing more closely on a particular use-case, Dujardin, Edwards, and Beckingham discussed the benefits of Diigo in a U.K.-based online Master's program for professional communication (2012). Specifically, they detailed how a geographically-dispersed group of students utilized Diigo to generate an annotated bibliography on the topic of visual communication. Summarizing their findings, Dujardin, Edwards, and Beckingham noted that Diigo "added value and helped students to engage more deeply with the literature and learn through sharing," (p. 268), and they provide ample discussion of both potentials and limitations of Diigo within an online education environment catering to a demographic loosely thought of as "digital immigrants." Formal research efforts such as the two discussed above compliment or contextualize commentary on Diigo (and similar tools) provided by entities such as Educause, a United States-based nonprofit professional association dedicated to the role of information technology in higher education. For example, a post for the EducauseReviewOnline by Michael Ruffini advocates for the use of Diigo as a collaborative tool, providing tips as well as comparisons with similar services (2011). Such resources aimed at educators are plentiful, and coalesce within the Diigo environment itself through user-groups such as the publicly-accessible "Diigo in Education" group (citation).

Ideas about using Diigo as a collaborative tool in education align with participatory culture as articulated by Henry Jenkins (most notably

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