

Content Curation and the School Librarian



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“Content curation is the act of continually identifying, selecting and sharing the best and most relevant online content and other online resources (and by that I mean articles, blog posts, videos, photos, tools, tweets, or whatever) on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience.”

—Ann Handley, *TopRank Online Marketing Blog* (2011)

Librarians have been curating long before digital curation. The curation of reference materials for use by patrons before the advent of the Information Age was meticulously developed and maintained in the form of encyclopedias, specialized reference books, and vertical files (see figure 1). This curation ensured that patrons had access to the best information available in an easy-to-use format. Thus, to librarians at least, “curation,” the new buzz word in education circles, is really an old and familiar idea.

Curation in the 21st-century is much the same as what librarians did in the past with vertical files. Essentially, librarians, students, and other educators gather resources from the Web and organize them in user-friendly, web-based formats. Curation tools can include online social-bookmarking services like Diigo, Delicious, Digg, Reddit, and more visually oriented bookmarking services like Pinterest and Symbaloo. Then there are hybrid curation tools that not only allow bookmarking but also enable creating stories (Storify), and customized magazines or newspapers (Scoop.it and Paper.li).



Figure 1. Librarian's 20th-century curation tool: vertical file.

Curation and Your PLN

Curation, even when using these digital tools, still must follow certain guidelines if the results are to be useful to patrons. A good school librarian who is going to embark on the digital curation path would benefit greatly from having a well-developed professional learning network (a.k.a. personal learning network or PLN). With a well-developed PLN the best content on the Web will be easier to find, and the librarian will also have the ability to read reviews

for a specific school audience. Additionally, a good curator adds his or her own original content: thoughts, creations, solutions, etc.

Content curation isn't a skill just reserved for school librarians and other educators. Curation is actually a valuable 21st-century skill for students. They need to learn how to locate, filter, evaluate, and rank content, activities that lead to organizing and sorting information and ideas, and creating original content. Students then share their original creations with other students

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and blogs of how other leading educators used the content. A good curator collects content—in a variety of formats such as text, videos, and images—that is relevant

in their personal learning networks, and this is the process during which real problem-solving happens and real connections are made. We can help each of our students become:

“...a learner that pulls in information from many different sources and media at once, reflects on the information, and then creates new content based on that information that is then shared with other learners in an interactive way that often allows those learners to also learn and create... It means using everything at your disposal to create something new in the discipline.” —Jane Eyre, *A Wandering Eyre* (2011)

Social Bookmarking Services

Online social bookmarking services like Diigo, Delicious, Digg, and Reddit allow a pooling of Web resources with other users sharing similar interests—resources that are not tied to just one specific computer or browser. My personal favorite is Diigo. Diigo enables users to keep their bookmarks private, share as part of a group, or make the bookmarks public. Easy-to-use tools enable highlighting, annotating, and sharing great finds with your social-networking groups. Within Diigo you may also join groups with similar interests and follow bookmarks posted by other Diigo users. To learn more about how Diigo works watch this short, informative video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORvAkTuL02A&feature=youtu.be. In Internet-years, these tools are the older siblings in the curation family. The downside of these curation tools is that they are limited to text-based bookmarking.

The younger, hipper siblings in the curation family make things pop by associating visual recognition with the bookmark as seen in Pinterest and Symbaloo. These are my new, favorite curation tools. Symbaloo organizes your bookmarks using sleek buttons with icons or site logos

that can be associated with your computer’s homepage, making all of your most important links available when you start up your computer. “The user can drag and drop items to organize them in a way that is convenient and practical. The items, or tiles, can be searched so users can find those that are most relevant to the items they are adding” (Gatto 2012). Symbaloo is easy to use once a webmix has been created. However, I have found the backend set up of a Symbaloo webmix to be a bit of a challenge and a definite turn-off for people who are not computer-savvy. Here is the URL for the Symbaloo I curated for my high school and displayed on my library Moodle page <www.symbaloo.com/mix/ahssymbaloo>.

Pinterest, the baby of the curation family, is currently my all-time favorite curation tool (see figure 2)! It is so easy to use and extremely addictive. Pinterest is a bulletin-board-style social web-sharing tool that allows users to create and manage topic-based collections. Users can browse other boards for ideas and re-pin finds to their own collections. Pinterest also seamlessly allows users to share their pins on both Twitter and Facebook. Initially, I started using Pinterest to collect odds and ends for my personal life: recipes, favorite quotes, arts and crafts ideas, etc. I loved it so much I wanted to find a way to use it at work, too. I started using Pinterest at my school by developing a Library Pinterest account <<http://pinterest.com/ahslibrary>>. When I showed my Library Pinterest account to my high school students they suggested how I might separate the items pinned on my Library Board into more subject-specific categories that have now blossomed into a set of useful resources for students and teachers.

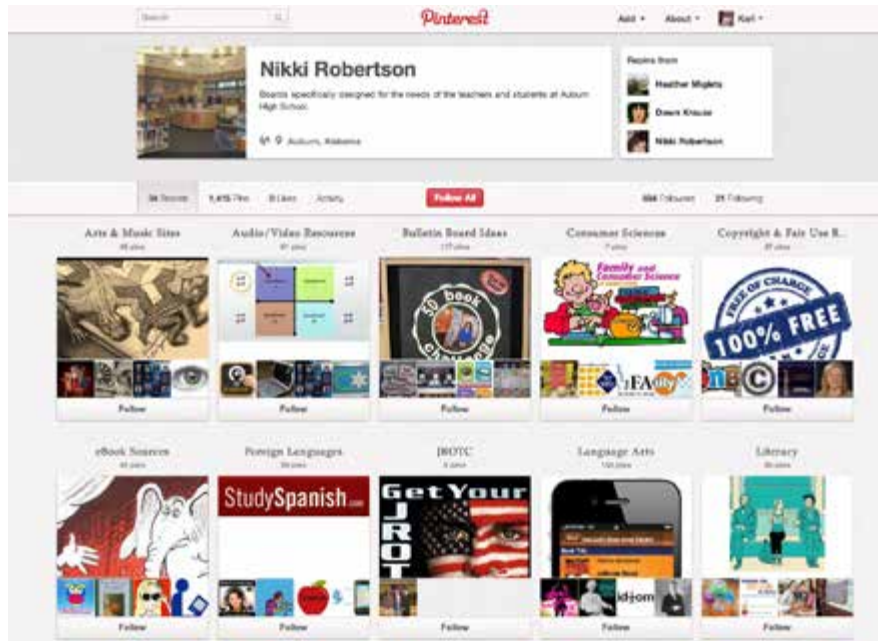


Figure 2. Librarian’s 21st-century curation tool: school library’s Pinterest board.

I can’t begin to emphasize what an awesome curation tool Pinterest can be in your school. It is the curation tool that students, parents, and teachers will actually use!

I taught a professional-development session to my high school staff on how to use Pinterest in school, and the session and the idea were received with great enthusiasm. In fact, I have never had a curation tool received so well! For school, collaboration is one of the best features of Pinterest. For instance, I created a Special Education Board for my school and then added each of our special education teachers as collaborators. Now any of the special education teachers can add to this board, and students and parents can refer to the board for a list of great resources to use at home. Our IB/AP art teacher Joe Dyer (see figure 3) uses Pinterest to work on collaborative art project boards with his students.

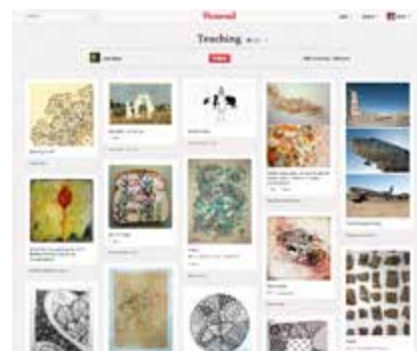


Figure 3. Teacher’s 21st-century collaboration tool: Pinterest boards for art projects.

I also taught a session on Pinterest at the Alabama Educational Technology Conference in Trussville this summer. Even though my session on Pinterest was the last session on the last day, there was standing room only! I can’t begin to emphasize what an

awesome curation tool Pinterest can be in your school. It is the curation tool that students, parents, and teachers will actually use! Want more information about Pinterest? Check out the “What is Pinterest?” board at <http://pinterest.com/cnsmd/what-is-pinterest>.

Hybrid Curation Tools

Hybrid curation tools not only allow for bookmarking but also for the creation of stories—with Storify for example—and customized magazines or newspapers—with tools such as Scoop.it and Paper.li.

Studying current events? Students can gather information from social-media sites using Storify to curate and connect resources on a current-events topic, presidential election, healthcare reform, etc.

Storify: Create Your Own Narrative from Online Content

Storify lets you bring together information scattered across the Web to blend social stories into a coherent narrative to which you can also add your own narration. The content can come from social networks like Facebook and Twitter, as well as from YouTube, Google+, Flickr, Diigo, and a virtually endless list of sites. I like to use Storify to narrate the Alabama School Library Association monthly Twitter Chat Sessions for those who either were unable to participate in the actual chat or want to review the chat to gather the many amazing

resources shared on the topic for that month. Using Storify allows those reading the narrative to bookmark favorite links, respond to participants, and add to the conversation without ever leaving the Storify site. Storify also provides easy URLs and embed codes so that curated stories can be shared on personal and professional websites.

Storify is also a great way to bring social media into the classroom for meaningful, educational use. Studying current events? Students can gather information from social-media sites using Storify to curate and connect resources on a current-events topic, presidential election, healthcare reform, etc. Students then add their own narration to weave the information gathered from various social-media sites into a meaningful story.

With the Common Core’s emphasis on nonfiction, Storify is a perfect classroom tool. When reading nonfiction text, students can use Storify to scan the Web for videos, links, pictures, and more related to the nonfiction text. The same techniques can be applied when students are reading a novel. Students can create a Storify story on the author’s life or about the time period in which the novel is set. The possibilities are endless, and the tool can be used in virtually any subject area.

Scoopit: Organizing Online Content into an Online Magazine

Scoop.it is an online curation tool that allows users to organize gathered content in a slick magazine format. Scoop.it can search for information by keyword, can be connected to your Twitter and blog, and will also pull information from your Google Reader. To create your customized Scoop.it magazine

you simply scan the information pulled from the various sources specified in your account, and then sort, rank, and arrange the content provided to engage your targeted audience. I have created two Scoop.it “magazines,” one for my school and one for school librarians: www.scoop.it/t/ahs-scoop-it and www.scoop.it/t/school-libraries (see figure 4).



Figure 4. Colleagues’ 21st-century curation tool: Scoop.it online magazine.

When I teach classes about Twitter, one piece of advice I always give attendees is to establish or follow an already established Paper.li so that they can scan tweets much in the same way they scan the headlines in a newspaper.

Paper.li: Compile Your Own Online Newspaper

Paper.li is like bringing in “virtual” newspaper clippings on topics discussed in class through tweets. Teacher Kate Morgan’s students tweet topic-relevant links, sources, pictures, and videos that support topics discussed in class. These resources are then curated into their customized Paper.li, *Weekly Vibe*. Kate says the great thing about Paper.li is that it gets the class talking about what they discover on their own outside of school hours and the four walls of the classroom. (For more about Kate’s approach to teaching, go to <http://community.paper.li/2011/10/12/kate-morgan-curating-the-classroom>.)

I love using Paper.li to keep up with tweets that I may have missed. When I teach classes about Twitter, one piece of advice I always give attendees is to establish or follow an already established Paper.li so that they can scan tweets much in the

same way they scan the headlines in a newspaper. Here is the URL for my personal Paper.li: <http://paper.li/nikkidrobotson>.

Twitter chats like #edchat go at a fast and furious pace, and keeping up with all of the great information shared during a chat is impossible in real time. Thus, my favorite Paper.li is the EdChat Daily at <http://paper.li/tag/edchat>.

Following a Long Tradition

From the Library of Alexandria’s papyrus scrolls, to the vertical files 20th-century librarians used, to the digital curation tools mentioned here, librarians have curated resources to help their patrons, and curation is a time-honored task that will exist regardless of the tools used. What matters isn’t the tool; it’s the relevance, ease of use, and real-life connections librarians make for their patrons that matter.



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Robertson is a veteran educator who is passionate about 21st-century

education, collaboration with other school librarians and education professionals, and assisting students in becoming well-informed, critically thinking digital citizens. Currently, she is the school librarian and technology coordinator at Auburn High School, listed by *Newsweek* as one of the

top 100 schools in the nation. She is the cofounder of *EdCamp Atlanta* www.edcampatlanta.org. She also moderates the Alabama School Library Association Twitter Chat sessions the first Tuesday of each month at #aslachat. She has been a frequent presenter for SimpleK12, Alabama Educational Technology Conference, Georgia Educational Technology Conference, Alabama School Library Association, Alabama Library Association, Library 2.011, and Library 2.012.



Visit www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest for more features and resources from the current issue, "Professional Learning Networks," along with information on future issues of Knowledge Quest!

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