

In the Classroom 55

Using Curation to Stay Abreast of a Changing Field

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks for taking the time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. Thanks for joining me on what I am having, is a snowy day. I know you can be doing other things, maybe you're doing other things, but you're hanging out with me, and I really do appreciate it. This week, I am going to talk about curation as a way of keeping your finger on the pulse of change, and how I do it in terms of being an instructional technologist.

I'm going to spend a few minutes. I expect this episode to be rather short, but I'm going to focus on how I serve the faculty that I serve through a regular practice of curation, and the tools that I'm using. I talked a little bit about this in the episode on personal learning environments. I encourage you to go check that out, and I will go ahead and put that into the show notes. I have a regular role that I need curation to help me carry it out.

One of my primary roles is to help faculty implement a strategy or weave technology into their curriculum. The quicker that I can do this, the more they appreciate it, naturally. I'm able to do this because I have a collection or curation of resources at my hand that I can rapidly pull up. I've just been doing this over many years, 15, 20 years that I've been collecting these resources, one way or another.

I also use it, this idea of curation is, I want to continuously scan the horizon to see what's coming next, to see if there's any new technologies, see how different instructional methods are being used. Anytime something catches my eye, I try to put it into my curation, and build upon that. It also allows me, this idea of curation, to deep dive into a topic to expand my knowledge on a specific topic. That's what I do. That's what I use it for. I use a number of tools in order to help me do this. My curation habit is really divided into two segments. One is a deep dive into a topic, and the other is my daily curation routine. I'm going to start with the deep dive.

When I do a deep dive on a topic, such as preparing for a podcast, I use a collection of tools to get started. The first, as you can probably expect, is I use Google. Google is one of the first places that I start. I pull up a web browser, and I type in my query, and I start looking through resources. Depending on what's in my search query, will dictate what resources I get, and I continuously tweak that search query, and follow it down different paths. One of the nice things about Google, is it will let you know what other people have been searching on. That also helps direct my path. If you ever look at Google, when you do a search on Google, probably in the middle of the page, as you're scrolling down, will have a list of questions. Well, these are top questions that other people are asking. If you could select one of those questions, that'll take you down a path. You can massage the things that you're looking for based on those. If

you scroll all the way down to the bottom, you'll have these other key terms or other phrases. Those are also popular phrases. It's just a quick way of expanding your search or narrowing it down to exactly what you want. I start with Google, and I pull up the material.

Now, I also may pull up searches in Google Scholar. That really narrows it down to academic journals that I want to be exploring, and seeing what kind of research has been written on a topic. This really depends on if I'm taking a more academic approach to it, or if I'm just trying to find a way to apply a concept, what folks have been doing to actually put it into practice. Depending on what my needs are, will dictate whether I need to go into Google Scholar, but definitely a great place to start for some research.

YouTube is another place that I will go. The thing I like about researching in YouTube is because usually when it comes to applying technology, there's a lot of wonderful folks out there who have gone ahead and showed me how to apply it. Rather than reinvent the wheel, I try to capture those. Or it will provide me with ideas that I can go ahead and apply as I'm teaching it to faculty. I have those resources at hand. Those three tools right there, get me about 80% where I need to go. That's a good place to be at the moment. That energy will get me the most resources in terms of doing a deep dive on a subject.

What do I do with those resources? Well, there's one tool that I use over and over and over again, and it's called Diigo. It is a curation tool. Basically, it is a social bookmarking tool. It allows you to save favorite resources and put them, basically, into this cloud-based repository that you can later review. One of its strengths is being able to apply one or more tags to each of your resources. This allows you to organize them, and that you can pull those tags or use those tags to tap into your resources, if you're working on curation, for example, the idea of curation.

Over time, I have collected a number of resources related to curation, and I have tagged them as curation. I can go into Diigo and do a search for my tag on curation, and it will bring me up my collection of resources. That just gets me moving on a project that much faster. These are resources I've already looked at, I liked, and I wanted to keep because I plan to use them again in the future. That is what I do to for a deep dive.

My other strategy is just daily curation. Through my day to day work, I will find things that I like, and I will save them away. I will add tags depending on the particular topic, and one day I will find a need for that particular topic, and I'll have these resources at my fingertips. Part of that daily curation is I use a couple of tools in order to help me do that. One is called Feedly. Now, Feedly, its sole purpose is to aggregate RSS feeds, Rich Simple Syndication. You get those feeds from, for example, blogs that you go to. There's a number of very clever people out there that are writing blogs and sharing what they know. Rather than go to their blog every day, I will plug their blog into Feedly, and anytime something new shows up, Feedly will let me know. Then I can review and see if I want to look at that particular blog post and read it and decide what I want to do with it. One of the things I like about Feedly is it allows me to organize all these different feeds. I have a number of different categories such as education, higher education, instructional technology or design, book publishing, gamification. I have just

a number of different groups where I, over time, I've gone out and I found blogs that I like that were relating to those particular topics, and blogs that I want to go check back on, and instead I put them into Feedly. When something new comes up, there it is, and then I decide, whatever I'm looking at, whether it's worth keeping. If it's worth keeping, then I will push that into Diigo and apply a tag to it, or more than one tag to it. Then I can use that later. It also forces me to keep an eye on the horizon, see what's new, is coming out. Folks are constantly writing about new ways to apply concepts, or new concepts that have come about, or new tools. I'm interested in this.

Another way that I get content is through newsletters. These are typically because I signed up for something. I wanted a resource, and as a result, I get put on a newsletter. If I think the newsletter is worthwhile, I'll stay on the newsletter. Otherwise, I will unsubscribe. These newsletters often have great resources. When I click on links, I will go to those particular resources. If I like them, I'll save them to Diigo. I squirrel away a lot of resources in Diigo that way.

The other way that I get resources is just through chance encounters. Through my day to day, somebody may reference something, and I'll scribble it down in my bullet journal. Or I'm listening to a podcast and they'll mention something, I'll scribble it down in my bullet journal. When I get a moment, I will pull up a web browser, and I will search for those things, and then I will decide if I want to save them to Diigo or not.

Diigo is my central hub for all these resources that I'm curating. It's proven to be a very powerful tool. If you're not using it, I would really encourage you to go check it out. So far, in Diigo, I've saved nearly 20,000 resources. These are organized across 1,700 different tags that keep a semblance of order there. One of the nice things about Diigo, if I pull up a resource that I've already saved there, Diigo will let me know, that on the tool for the browser, it's a browser extension tool, there'll be a flag indicating that that resources already part of that collection. I don't have to save it again, but I can always update the tags if I want, but I just know that it's there.

Every day, I'm adding new resources, new things that add to my knowledge, but are also a resource that I potentially could be hand out to other people, like faculty.

Some key things that I want you to keep in mind when you're using this, one, this is really sped up my ability to provide service to the faculty because I have this collection of vetted resources at my fingertip. To get there, you have to get into the habit of saving these resources into Diigo that you need to do daily scans of your horizon, through newsletters, through blogs that you're reading. I would recommend Feedly as a way to curate those blogs, or to aggregate those blogs so you don't have to go to all these different sites that you can go to one place. This allows me to do a daily scan of that and save those valuable resources.

If you have to do a deep dive on a topic, every once a while, you're required to go out there, very quickly, I just save those things to Diigo. Then I'll do a scan of the resource to see if it fits my needs, and if so, I'll save it to Diigo, and I'll collect those resources very rapidly. Then I can sit down and really sift through those resources because I have them tagged, and I click on that tag, and here's my list of resources. I can pull

them up one at a time, and really sift through them and pull out the nuggets of information that I want.

With that, I can share out a tag to somebody else, and I encourage you to do that. I can plug those tags into classes that I'm building for students. If I'm building a workshop on a specific topic, I can also reference that list of resources very easily by providing one tag as opposed to multiple tags, but these resources allow me to build instruction, support instruction and support my faculty. It just provides a jump on anything that I need to develop. This is served me for probably two decades now. I just wanted to share that tip. I know it was a quick tip, but I think it's a valuable strategy that I have been employing over the years. With that, here's a plug for my book.