Diigo Shared Annotation Directions for Teachers

Diigo—a tool that many researchers use for social bookmarking—has another powerful feature: With Diigo (http://www.diigo.com), members of student research groups can add highlights and annotations to an article that they are studying together. Once teachers have set up student research groups, created student accounts, and shown classes how to add bookmarks to shared Diigo collections, conversations around content are literally one-click away. This set of directions can help teachers to structure successful shared annotation efforts in Diigo:

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Steps to Take	**Directions**
Discuss appropriate highlighting	Just like traditional classroom highlighting efforts, students left on their own in *Diigo* will highlight entire texts, limiting the overall value of their collective efforts. When introducing collective highlighting to students, emphasize that students should always be able to answer the following three questions before adding a ***Diigo Highlight*** to a shared text: 1. How will this information help my peers to understand this article better? 2. What makes this information important enough to draw attention to? 3. Will my group want to find this information again quickly when we are working on our final products? Why?
Introduce the language of Diigo Annotations	Today's students have become accustomed to the idea that anything written online can be written without care. Internet shorthand abbreviations, poor grammar, and nonexistent punctuation characterize many of the interactions between peers in digital forums. For ***Diigo Annotations*** to be valuable, however, students need to follow three specific rules: 1. ***Include Digital Leads***: Anytime a writer is responding to someone in a digital conversation, it is important to include a lead—or a short quote from the original author—so that new readers can follow a thread of conversation. Example: *John wrote, "I think we need to include these facts in our persuasive letter." I agree, John. These facts are great!* 2. ***Add Value***: Face-to-face conversations are often filled with throwaway comments. Participants constantly say polite things like, "*Right*" or "*Yeah, yeah*" to show others they are listening and in agreement. In a digital conversation, however, those kinds of comments get in the way, burying good ideas under piles of politeness. EVERY comment in a digital conversation must ***add value***—spotlighting new information, pushing against thinking, asking a new question—and must be grammatically correct. Otherwise they interfere with the learning of the group. 3. ***End with Questions:*** If a comment was important enough to add to a digital conversation, it must be designed to make other participants think harder or react to new ideas, right? Otherwise, it hasn't added any value to the ongoing conversation. That means that comments added to conversations should always end with questions that stimulate continued thinking about the topic being studied. When teaching students to ***end with questions***, be sure to emphasize that good questions are open-ended. If a question can be answered with a "yes" or a "no," then it doesn't encourage continued conversations. Also, encourage students to rephrase their questions two or three different ways. Sometimes, new language helps to clarify exactly what an author is asking!

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Spotlight quality annotations in class	While students can certainly become experts at shared annotations around articles in *Diigo*, it will never happen without systematic efforts on the part of their classroom teachers to spotlight quality annotations.
	
	Whenever you involve students in *Diigo Annotation* efforts, set aside time during class each day to look together at one or two annotations that have been added to ongoing conversations. Consider asking students to rate *Diigo Annotations* on a scale of one to five, with one representing "*That comment didn't add any value to our group's efforts to learn together*" and five representing "*What an amazing comment! That really made me think.*"
	
	You might even consider using the following categories to score individual *Diigo Annotations* or entire articles studied by groups:
	
	    Needs Improvement: Annotations seem to be completely out of place— unconnected to the student, topic and/or selection. Little evidence suggests that the student has thought deeply before commenting.
	
	    You're Getting There: While annotations demonstrate some obvious connection to the student, topic and/or selection, they demonstrate simple thinking. Reader is not convinced that the student has thought deeply before commenting.
	
	    Rock Solid: All annotations are clearly connected to the student, topic and/or selection. Comments provide evidence that the student has considered the text carefully and thought deeply before sharing with the group.
	
	    Annotation Master: All comments are clearly connected to the student, topic, and/or selection. Comments are challenging and interesting to the reader— encouraging further study of the topic and/or selection.

Get involved in conversations	The best way to ensure that the *Diigo Annotation* efforts in your classroom are a success is to get involved yourself! Follow the conversations that your students are having. Find places to ask great questions. Highlight important information and explain why you think your highlights matter. Push the thinking of your students. *Better yet, allow your own thinking to be pushed!* Consider making a few annotation errors—adding a throwaway comment, highlighting carelessly, commenting without thinking deeply—on purpose and watch what happens! Chances are your students will catch your mistake and call you out—there's nothing better for a tween or teen than pointing out places where teachers make mistakes. If your students don't catch your errors, spotlight them in a classroom conversation and ask for feedback, demonstrating openness to continued improvement. Every contribution that you make in a conversation around a shared article is an opportunity to model for your students—and modeling has always been the most powerful method to teach!