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The 7 Red Flags:

Warning Signs when Sifting WebQuests

by Tom March

At BestWebQuests.com we use an **assessment matrix** and star system to rate WebQuests included in the database. However, we also learn a lot about great WebQuests by seeing how some very promising learning activities fall just short of this mark. As the first Tip for members, I thought it would be helpful to provide a series of questions that can be applied to any Web-based activity to see if in fact it is a great WebQuest.

These are NOT WebQuests

Step & Fetch it
Is there a Right Answer?

Is this a traditional lesson plan dressed up as a Web page? If the question / task involves the retrieval of a defined, known body of knowledge, this is not a WebQuest. WebQuests are use in ill-structured domains, places with lots of gray and little "black and white." The idea is for students to argue an opinion, not mumble back someone else's thinking.

A BestWebQuest: **Take Me on Vacation!**

Hip Hop Homework
Is the true Task Ctrl-C, Ctrl-V?

Similar to the "Step-and-and-Fetch-it" approach, Hip Hop Homework asks students to piece together information / answers from various sources. This is a step in the right direction, but it still doesn't ask students to do anything new (like interpret others' opinions). A WebQuest might ask students to gather information from different sources, but then prompts learners to transform this acquired knowledge into a new understanding.

A BestWebQuest: **Literary Fan Club**

Anything Goes
Could it be done without instruction?

Sometimes an online activity will challenge students to do something creative or to solve a problem. This is positive! The downfall to the "Anything Goes" approach, is that to complete the task, students don't have to draw from any of the previous instruction. The fix to this near WebQuest is to ask students to apply a set of criteria to their creation. Rather than write any play or poem, or problem-solve any solution, invoke criteria that require students to integrate the new learning into their product.

A BestWebQuest: **Influencing Your Photographic Eye**

Tag Team PowerPoint

Do the roles stay separate?

This is a common mistake that almost everyone has fallen into at some point. Students work together as teams and each member contributes, but their work stays in isolation from each other. Each member knows what he or she knows, but there's no group process that forces a synthesis of this wealth of knowledge. The classic example is where each team member is responsible for one slide in a presentation, one card in a stack, or one quadrant in a newsletter. It's not hard to take it that one extra step and have a true WebQuest out of all this time, effort and learning. And it's a shame not to.

A BestWebQuest: Quest for Peace: An Internet WebQuest on Kashmir **Peace Proposal Consensus**

These COULD be WebQuests

Slacker's Delight
Can one person do all the work?

If an online activity prompts learners to construct new meaning, does this apply to all students in the group? Or is everyone happy if the bright kid does all the work? A killer WebQuest jigsaws the group process so that everyone must contribute. Even though some students' opinions might stand out in their group, the final task must involve everyone's participation in a substantial way. The way this could be a great WebQuest is if it is for use by only one learner. This would tend to be more advanced learners who can hold multiple perspectives in mind at once and evaluate them. Adults and gifted and talented students care good candidates for this approach.

A BestWebQuest: **Antarctica - An Issue for all Australians**

These ARE WebQuests, but they could be GREAT!

Tunnel Vision
The 3 R's? (Real, Rich and Relevant)

The next level of achievement in WebQuest design involves taking advantage of the contextual connections available through the Web. If you're studying The Lord of the Flies, go beyond Golding to street children in Algeria. When experimenting with the applied science of bottle rockets and catapults, discuss the ethics and efficacy of smart bombs. When researching early colonists from the Mayflower or First Fleet, update things to boat people and Globalization. Great WebQuests leverage the medium and the medium enables contextualizing the content to intrigue, perplex, and enrich.

A BestWebQuest: **2030: Homesteading Mars**

Ho-Hum
Are there Ah-Ha's & Assimilation?

Whereas a Tunnel Vision approach doesn't access the wealth of the Web's contexts and juxtapositions, a Ho-Hum WebQuest may expose students to interesting contrasts and comparisons during the roles phase, but the final group process doesn't produce anything from this rich mixture and cognitive dissonance. When students struggle to assimilate new

information and perspectives, they are creating new schema, achieving the cognitive ah-ha's that are the heart of transformative learning. By applying a new model, set of constraints, or varying the scenario, learners have the map of a conceptual pattern to help shape the development of new schema.

A BestWebQuest: **A Separate Peace: A Teenager Experiences World War II**