Authoring Tools and the Impact on WebQuest Quality

Teachers have often reported that the effort required to make a WebQuest live on the web detracted from their ability to use the pedagogical tool. To ameliorate that problem successive technology tools have been employed over the past thirteen years. However, does the tool employed merely act as a transparent medium to enable online access to content or may it serve as a partner leading to increased consideration of the efficacy of the content? This brief paper will present the preliminary results of a study centered on the evaluation of sixty-three WebQuests created by undergraduate teacher education students and any relationship between the tool employed and the quality of the WebQuest.

WebQuests have long been at the forefront of sound pedagogical use of the web resources. Initially conceived by Dr. Bernie Dodge in 1995, WebQuests enjoy worldwide enthusiasm and usage. The components (i.e. introduction, task, process, guidance, evaluation, etc.) of WebQuests have evolved over time in accordance with increased emphasis on assessment, filtering of net resources and ease of multimedia add-ons. Additionally, the actual technological construction of the WebQuest itself has change significantly. Initially, WebQuest enthusiasts found themselves faced with the need for rudimentary knowledge in hypertext markup language (html), the challenges of moving those documents to a remote server, and the dilemma of updating those files easily. In subsequent years, html editors such as Microsoft’s Front Page and Adobe’s Dreamweaver eased those challenges somewhat. Intermediary web applications such as Filamentality were employed by many in an effort to construct WebQuests quickly and easily. More recently, blogs and wikis have been employed as publication tools in the WebQuest arena. Dr. Dodge tackled this problem head-on when, in 2005, he introduced the QuestGarden, an “…on-line authoring tool, community and hosting service…” that purported to “…make it easier and quicker to create a high quality WebQuest.” (Dodge, 2008).

However, does the ease of use of the authoring tool employed indeed lead to higher quality WebQuests? In a university classroom setting, given identical scaffolding for the content of the WebQuest prior to the creation of the WebQuest in an authoring tool intended to prepare the quest for online delivery, does the interaction with the tool – whether it be the GardenQuest online tool or the local html editor – afford the same degree of interaction between creator and teacher education faculty regarding both the technology employed and the content being
expressed? Does the technology employed have the ability to shape cognition and enhance metacognition of a preconceived task? (Solomon, et al, 1991) Or is the technology an inert tool, used only to advance the conceptual WebQuest to its published, online format?

To explore these questions, this researcher collected over a two-year period, sixty-three WebQuests created by undergraduate upper-division teacher education students. These students were enrolled in a required educational technology class. All students participated in a WebQuest prior to receiving identical introductions to the WebQuest concept. Following these activities, each student was required to prewrite the WebQuest using word processing software. Students then were randomly assigned to create their WebQuest using either the QuestGarden tool or the html editor, Dreamweaver. Subsequent student/teacher and student/student interactions were observed for quantity and content. Completed WebQuests were then evaluated by three independent faculty members for purpose, content, accuracy, adequacy and appropriateness of resources, and the degree to which they were inquiry-based and encouraged higher order thinking skills.

As of the date of this proposal, this evaluation has been completed on approximately 72 percent of the sixty-three WebQuests. Thus, this proposal is for a brief paper that will present the research methodology, evaluation tools and preliminary findings as available in early January 2009.

**Bibliography**
