Title of Session: WebQuests - When is a WebQuest NOT a WebQuest?
Moderator: Bernie Dodge
Title of File: 20030811wq
Date: August 11, 2003

Tapped In transcript for 2003.08.11 18:11:52
Room: After School Online

BJ: If you haven't read the 10 steps above this chat window, please read that to help you have a successful experience
BernieD joined the room.
BernieD: Greetings, all!
BernieD: I think we have three continents represented here this evening.
BernieD: we'll start formally in a minute or two.
BJ nods...people are still arriving
BJ: Welcome to tonight's WebQuest discussion
BJ: the topic tonight is When is a WebQuest not a WebQuest?
BJ: If you have any technical questions, please send me a private message
BJ: I'm assuming you've all detached your chat window so let's start, Bernie
BernieD: Thanks in advance for your usual help in facilitating, BJ.
BJ . o O (would you like to do introductions?)
BernieD: OK... how about one-line intros from everyone?
BernieD: I'm Bernie Dodge, a professor of Ed Tech at San Diego State University.
MistyS: visiting teacher for San Diego city schools, elementary
BeeD: Barbara Dieu teaches EFL in Sao Paulo, Brazil
BJ: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania and a helpdesk volunteer for Tapped In
GrantC: Hello, I teach high school science in El Centro, Ca.
KeikoS: Keiko Schneider, ESL and Japanese teacher from New Mexico.
PattyB: I'm Patty Bisker, EDTEC student in central Ohio
DevonB: San Diego State Credential Student
RebeccaMH: I'm Rebecca Holmlund, SDSU ED Tech student--working on my first webquest
GeraldMa: Jerry Marino student at SDSU in EDTECH
KurtU: San Diego State grad; looking for a position as a high school Math teacher.
JimSp: Jim Sprague here, a student in Edtec 570 at SDSU
GeorgeM: I'm George- student at SDSU taking EDTEC 570
MicheleA: I'm Michele Adler an English teacher from Chula Vista, Calif. working in Edtech 570
BernieD: OK... quite a home team here.
BernieD: Our topic tonight is "When is a WebQuest NOT a WebQuest?"
SusanR: K to8 Occasional Teacher from Ottawa, Ontario, Canada and presenter here at TI (Reader's Theater on Tues)
KirkM: I am a math teacher and softball coach at Sheldon HS in Sac, I will be starting the ed tech MS at CSUS in 2 weeks
BernieD: Welcome to all of you. Since there's a pretty large crowd, please hold questions or comments until there's a pause in the presentation.

BernieD: Our topic tonight is "When is a WebQuest NOT a WebQuest?"

BernieD: That may sound like just semantics, but it's actually an important question that points to a problem. It all comes down to the grassroots nature of WebQuests. Anyone can write one; there's no copyright or trademark of the name "WebQuest", and so many well-intentioned teachers are putting up lessons that miss the definition in one or more ways.

BernieD: So what is the definition? I've used several definitions over the years. Here's the latest:

BernieD: A WebQuest is a guided inquiry learning activity wrapped around a challenging task which requires applying higher level thinking skills to information from the web.

BernieD: Because many of the WebQuests you find online were the first ones by their authors, it's not surprising that they often miss the target by a little or a lot. I'm hoping that by pointing to some of the ways in which good intentions can go astray, I'll be able to help the next cohort of first-time WebQuest authors to avoid the same mistakes.

BernieD: I guess that particularly applies to you 570 lads and lasses.

BernieD: Let me preface the examples I'm going to show by saying that all of these represent a lot of hard work on the part of their authors and that most of these lessons are potentially useful as instruction. They're on the list tonight not because they're not good, they're just not good WebQuests.

BernieD: I've divided these non-WebQuests into several clumps.

BernieD: Serial Activities is what we might call the first category of near misses.

BernieD: One critical characteristic of a WebQuest is that it has a central focus. That usually means there's a challenging, complex task at its core. That task may require the completion of several subtasks along the way, but they all lead to one multifaceted goal. Some novice WebQuest designers miss that point and create a web-based sequence of activities that are all about a common theme, but they don't build on each other. WebQuests for lower elementary grades are particularly prone to this.

BernieD: Here's an example: http://euphrates.wpunj.edu/students/facciolongon/CIEE624/

BernieD: OK... what do you all think might make this a non-WebQuest?

BeeD: Looks more like a treasure hunt activity

BernieD nods

KeikoS: Where is higher thinking?

BernieD: Somewhere else, I think.

JillCo: I agree, it even talks about a scavenger hunt!

KurtU: They're just exploring websites and writing their impressions. Not much thought required here.

BernieD: It's just a sequence of activities that don't really build up to anything larger.

GrantC: I agree.

KirkM: it doesn't seem necessary to know the material to answer the questions

MicheleA: Seems that most of the activities are confined to identification

BernieD: Sometimes, you can see a WebQuest that is so beautiful on the eyes that you might not notice that it's structurally just like this one.

BernieD: And here's a widely known example of the same thing:
http://www.iwebquest.com/egypt/ancientegypt.htm

BernieD: Novice WebQuest authors are sometimes swept away by the eye candy of this one, but it's really just the same as the first.

GeraldMa: There sure are a lot of activities on this site. Don't the missions qualify as WebQuest tasks

BernieD: Good question, Jerry.

KeikoS: I agree with Bernie. It *is* visually attractive.

BeeD: they apparently have to reproduce what they have read

BernieD: A WebQuest often has a sequence of subtasks, but the key difference in a good one is that the tasks are all part of some larger, complex whole. That isn't the case with Ancient Egypt.

BernieD: This is mostly serial busyness. Fun, perhaps, but doesn't lead to any deeper understanding of Egypt.

GrantC: You mean that all of the tasks are individual and do not combine into a larger learning experience?

BernieD nods to Grant.

DevonB: It's still just a bunch of questions to answer. Higher thinking skills aren't used.

KeikoS: I agree with Devon

GeraldMa: So...should we look at what would make these good WebQuests or will that come later?

BernieD: Just to cement your understanding, here's one more example of this type: http://www.geocities.com/khoffman475/camelot.html

MicheleA: It also looks like there's not much connection between the tasks other than the theme of Egypt

BernieD agrees strongly with Michele.

JillCo: Question - If this is not a webquest, then what would you call it?

BernieD: I'd call it a very nice web-based activity.

KirkM: it seems like they are lacking something to "think" about and simply providing something to "do"

BernieD: Exactly!

BernieD: So, muchachos y muchachas... let's not make any more like these!

KeikoS: or just don't call them WebQuest!

BernieD agrees.

BernieD: If everything is a WebQuest, then the word has no meaning.

SusanR: KnowledgeQuests???

BernieD: FactualKnowledgeQuests

BernieD: Some "WebQuests" are created by teachers who heard the term somewhere but don't seem to have gone to the web site and gotten the details. Here's one such example.

BernieD: http://its.guilford.k12.nc.us/webquests/nc/carowqi.htm

SusanR: ..does not massage the information acquired

BernieD: Just in case the interface is unclear, click on the waterfall.

BernieD: This is so far from a WebQuest that you can't even see WebQuests from here.

KeikoS giggles

BernieD: Sometimes there's a task that goes beyond simply answering questions, but it's such a low-level task that it really doesn't qualify as a WebQuest. For example:

BernieD: http://www2.grand-forks.k12.nd.us/iditarod/namelitter.html

BernieD: What's the task here? And what kind of thinking is required?

KurtU: It just gives the students some exposure to various websites.

BernieD nods at Kurt.

BernieD: What would they learn?

KirkM: It looks like a typical "yahoo" web page

KeikoS: I must say it is cute though ;->

GrantC: Vocabulary.

MicheleA: How to find a dog's name?

BernieD agrees with Keiko.

BeeD: association

KirkM: It looks like a typical "yahoo" web page

KirkM: the creator is simply showing off their pups

KurtU: They might learn how to navigate through IE.

GeraldMa: IMHO, I think you could argue that coming up with a name has some creative thinking in it. I always have a hard time naming things.

JillCo: They would learn how to explore on the computer a little. Very basic skills that might be good for a young beginner.

BernieD: Maybe, Jerry, but the creativity isn't graded here, or scaffolded in any way.

JimSp: Doesn't a Webquest assume basic computer skills?

BernieD: Should.

DevonB: Even if you wanted to teach the basic skills you can still have the students thinking at higher levels

BernieD: OK... let's move on to a less obvious breech.

GeraldMa: So if you evaluated the naming process and had it scaffolded properly you could make this an adequate WebQuest?

BernieD: Maybe.

BernieD: Research reports are an in-between category.

BernieD: Another tried and true instructional task is the creation of a research report. These generally require delving into a topic and summarizing it in some (usually prescribed) way. While there's no doubt that learning takes place in creating a research report, most don't meet the requirement of higher level thinking skills. What happens is summarizing, distilling, organizing, but not much synthesis or transformation of information into any new forms. Here's a typical research report labeled as a WebQuest:

BernieD: http://dms.wcs.k12.va.us/geography.htm

JimSp: So, a good webquest should involve higher levels of thinking and be something that you couldn't do without the internet?

KeikoS . o O (every single site uses Comic SansMS, what is with the font?) BernieD: It's cute and fuzzy, K.

BernieD agrees with Jim.

BernieD: What do we think of this one?

DevonB: I don't think I've seen an assignment that REQUIRED at least one print source.

BernieD: Librarians do it all the time.

MarshaR: I think it never asks students to critically use the information to answer some open ended kind of question that would require them weighing options and different views.

MicheleA: There doesn't seem to be any analysis, only report the info

BeeD: the task and the introduction do not go together somehow

SusanR: overwhelming...too many tutorials..

JillCo: It uses most of the skills we learned in 470. No analysis, but a compilation of data.

BernieD agrees with everyone.

GrantC: If this required HOTS, such as choosing whether to locate a team of agents there maybe.

MicheleA: The emphasis is on the presentation

GeorgeM: on the student page is a list of around 20 questions. should be narrowed to just a few.

BernieD: Yes... there are many tasks we could cook up that go beyond this one.

KeikoS: Gosh, this feels more like Computer literacy class.

BernieD: Could be that that's where it came from.

BernieD: Here's one with a compelling scenario:

http://www.socs.k12.in.us/schools/ovhs/branard/diseasequest_.html

KurtU: So, this webquest would be more appropriate if there were some central question that must be explored. Such as "What is the most central problem that a particular country faces?"

BernieD: Yes, Kurt. That's one possibility.

KirkM nods thoughtfully at Kurt

BernieD: Or which of these countries is the most "free"

GeorgeM: I can't read it- the colors are awful

BernieD: Astronomers sometimes refer to Mars as the Pink Planet. Not.

KirkM: . o O (cool gun though)

BernieD: If you strip away Baldezar and his ray gun, this is just another read-it and powerpoint-it exercise.

KeikoS: Even with the good intro/scenario, the core of the tasks is still the same...

BernieD: Yup.

BeeD: again...read , present and be convincing in a candy pink wrapper

KirkM: seems like they are using the web as a creative encyclopedia

BernieD: In fact, some of the more jaded kids will see the Martian part as just a gimmick.

BernieD: It's not really intrinsic to the learning.

MicheleA: Its the same id and report scenario

KeikoS: Students are just collecting info and putting it *without* their own thinking

JulieE: This seems regurgitated from a junior reader book to me

BernieD: Yup. And we're not going to write any new ones like this, right gang?????

BeeD: why is there a link to War of the Worlds? Should they use it as an idea for the Powerpoint presentation?

KeikoS looks around

BernieD: Just decoration, Bee.

BeeD: Easier said than done :-)

BernieD: OK... a new category.

JulieE: I think it was just something to add in

BernieD: Procedural or technical skills.

BernieD: There are some things in the K-12 curriculum that are challenging to learn, but which don't require much in the way of analysis, synthesis or creativity. Much of algebra falls into this category along with other topics in the realm of math at least as it is typically taught. Here's an example of a good looking lesson that seems to me to be mostly about learning to turn numbers into graphs.

BernieD: http://www.tctc.org/schoolinfo/CLUEm/Chartsandgraphs.htm

BernieD: Not a bad activity. It's certainly motivating to be using real data as you learn how to graph things, but...

DevonB: An interesting way to teach math but definitely not a webquest

KeikoS: There, their goal is to "demonstrate understanding"!

BernieD: Not understanding, really, more like comprehension.

KeikoS nods solemnly

KurtU: Graphing data in Excel doesn't really demonstrate understanding of how to graph.

KirkM agrees emphatically

SusanR: a vehicle for teaching the basis of graphing

BernieD: But not a WebQuest.

BernieD: OK... ready for a test?

KurtU: It might help them to recognize a graph when they see one.

SusanR agrees

KirkM: it's like teaching addition with a calculator

JulieE agrees

BernieD: Now that you've looked at some non-example WebQuests, lets take a look at some fresh ones. I'd like to show you some of the WebQuests that were submitted to the new portal very recently. Let's look at several and decide whether they qualify as good WebQuests and if so, why.

GrantC: There is some evaluation of data, but this does not seem to relate to some overall task that will require graph reading as a step to greater comprehension.

BernieD: Take a look at this one: http://www.members.tripod.com/wertzgeek/

GeraldMa: Looks like a research project to me

BernieD: Yup. Good hook, though.

KeikoS: I thought the idea of trading card was good and leading to somewhere...

RebeccaMH: The only higher order thinking skill I can see is the comparison between the geek and the student

KirkM: I like that it asks the student to COMPARE themselves to the scientist

KurtU: They could do this using an encyclopedia.

BernieD agrees with Rebecca

BernieD: and Kirk.

KirkM: this involves some synthesis

GeraldMa: Maybe they could collect and trade cards with the other kids....:-)

KirkM: this involves some synthesis

BernieD: But that isn't enough to qualify as higher level thinking.

JillCo: Really good hook, I have a son...Very definitely a research project.

KeikoS: Maybe they can expand the activity with the cards, but at this point, this is not qualified.

MarshaR: Gathering information and putting into baseball card form. Maybe if they added what was the most important accomplishment and/or how it effected the world.

KeikoS . o O (IMHO)

KirkM: sorry...repeating myself

BernieD: OK... here's another.

BernieD: http://faculty.trinityvalleyschool.org/fifthgrade/webquest/index.htm

KirkM: This seems to qualify...

BernieD: How many agree with Kirk?

KirkM: students have to "rank" what they learn
BeeD: compare, contrast, synthesize
BeeD: classify
KurtU: I liked it until I read the part about the automatic calculation.
GrantC: This requires synthesis and evaluation, both higher order thinking skills.
BernieD: I forget, are you a math teacher Kurt?
JulieE: they really have to think on this one
KurtU: Shouldn't the students decide on their own criteria of what makes them the greatest.
BeeD: and evaluate
KurtU: Yes, Math teacher.
KeikoS: I like the part they have to explain about the ranking
BernieD: Well, if you let them adjust the weightings, that's what they're doing.
GrantC: The students are supposed to make their own decisions concerning important information.
BernieD: And that, as Martha Stewart would say, is a good thing.
KurtU: Sorry, I didn't see where they could adjust the weighting.
GeraldMa: Frankly, I think the premise of the "greatest civilization" is a bit of a stretch
KeikoS giggles
MarshaR: I would think the greatest benefit will come as they discuss and figure out the order
KirkM chuckles
KurtU: I agree with Gerald. There is not definition provided of "greatest".
BernieD: Maybe this is a good way to point out the subjectiveness of any such "greatest" list.
JillCo: I like the individual and then group work.
KirkM: then they could apply it to their current culture....
GeraldMa: I think you're point of subjectiveness is a valuable one
KirkM: "How can we make it better?"
JulieE: explaining their positions could turn into a debate
BernieD: I'd add some guided discussion about how we make judgments of any kind.
MicheleA: That's better than a Powerpoint
RebeccaMH: Subjectiveness with supporting argument is higher order thinking, isn't it?
BernieD: Maybe have a look at the USNews rankings of colleges or those books of Best Places to Live.
GrantC: Which would lead to supporting your views with reasoned statements.
BernieD: Yes, R.
KeikoS: Humm
KurtU: Maybe instead of "greatest", the could compare highest technologically.
SusanR: I would like to see some oral presentations; maybe some dramatizations as well
BernieD: These are exactly the kinds of issues a good teacher would surface with a lesson like this.,
KirkM: on the other hand, what makes it "greatest" is where the extension comes in
BernieD: Well.... I see by the clock on the wall that tempus has fugited again.
MarshaR: I've been working on something similar to this with the dreaded topics I must teach on AUP, copyright and netiquette.

BernieD: Interesting, M.

KirkM: I must go , but thank you all for the stimulating discussion

BernieD: Unfortunately, we need to draw this to a close.

MarshaR: Trying to interject subjectivity from the perspective of balancing freedom and responsibility.....

KirkM applauds all

BernieD: Thanks to all of you for coming, and best of luck on writing your next quest!

KeikoS bows to Bernie and thanks class people to let me join

MarshaR: Thanks.

DevonB: Thanks

BJ: Thanks, Bernie!

BeeD: Thanks Bernie!

MicheleA: Now we know what not to do!

MistyS: thank you

KeikoS: Thank you, Bernie!

KurtU: Thanks.

JimSp: Thanks

GeorgeM: THX Bernie

GeraldMa: Thanks Bernie, very enlightening in many ways

JillCo: Informative, as always!

BernieD waves buh bye

GrantC: Thanks for the tutorial!

SusanR: Thank you, lots of clarification of what a webquest should be