

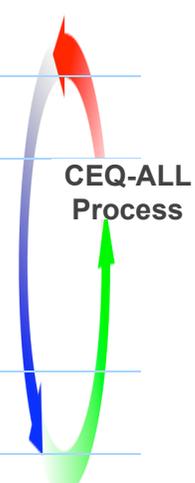
WebQuest 2.0: It's Process, not "Parts"

By Tom March
July / August 2009

Overview

This document attempts to embed what has always been the process of a WebQuest into the natural use of some effective Web 2.0 tools and authentic learning approaches. The table below highlights the sections of WebQuests as originally hypothesised by Professor Bernie Dodge, refined by myself over the years through integration with Filamentality and Web-and-Flow and now as the expression of routine learning experiences that can be part of contemporary learning. The following sections describe such a recommended process in greater detail. Those familiar with my work will recognise strategies such as Look to Learn activities and ClassPortals, but now see how these actually provide the foundation required to truly support students as they develop from novice to more expert learners. Teachers may find additional support for themselves in a related document: "Road Map for Working the Web 2.0."

WebQuest 1.0	Tom's WebQuest 1.5	Tom's WebQuest 2.0
Introduction	Introduction	Engagements
Task	Question & Task	Brainstorming
Information sources	Background for Everyone	Information Gathering
Process steps	Roles & Perspectives	Learning Paths
Guidance	Group Process / Transformation	Emerging Expertise
	Real World Feedback	Contribute Innovation
Conclusion	Conclusion	(Reflection)



Engagements

To initiate a WebQuest process, we attempt to excite interest & participation. Our best strategy is to have already established a pervasive spirit of inquiry in the classroom by routinely using Look to Learn activities. For a specific WebQuest, choose L2Ls that bring up the complexities, controversies and core attributes of the topic. Essentially we use these activities to create cognitive dissonance, but within a context that prompts an *inclination* to investigate and enough *sensitivity*



to see beyond black-and-white, so that students are disposed to fruitfully venture into the gray areas of a rich topic.

Brainstorming

It's important that learners "get their heads around" the subject. If we expect them to see the subtleties of a topic, they need to understand its basic nature. Brainstorming helps raise things to attention: prior knowledge, similarities and differences among related topics, critical attributes and where the outlines become fuzzy. Thus, it should be obvious that the phase "Brainstorming" doesn't mean "make a Mindmap," but to enter into an ongoing process of definition and elaboration throughout the entire WebQuest. Rather than make this a task to be completed, the savvy teacher will choose to "Think Visibly" at appropriate points as the WebQuest process unfolds. Depending on students' age and access to collaborative software tools, you may post lots of brainstorming sheets on the classroom walls, use VUE through a projector or create a series of Stixy boards. Progress from brainstorming that attempts to define prior knowledge of the domain to identifying which perspectives have vested interests in the topic, and then to questions that shape the direction of the WebQuest and the students' Learning Paths.



Information Gathering

Although you may provide a starting set of online resources for students as a list of links, a range of Web 2 tools allow the data-gathering phase to be more in tune with the personal and idiosyncratic way that people learn when they immerse themselves in a topic. In one approach, you might use Pageflakes to set up a set of RSS feeds related to the topic of the WebQuest. This could include current news articles, political cartoons, photo galleries, maps, YouTube videos, TED Talks, podcasts, etc. If students are used to accessing such a Pageflakes page as part of the class routine for discovering Look to Learn resources, they won't need any further training. Another useful tool is Clipmarks, where each student, team or your class can use an account to save sections of Web pages into an online database of tagged and shareable information. This strategy also has the benefit of aligning well with students' natural approach to research: surfing quickly through content. Such a "quick grab" is actually a good first step, given that the next will be a more focused look at the collection of "clips." A third tool to consider is Diigo. Like Clipmarks, Diigo is a tool for bookmarking, but it also offers tagclouds, groups, forums and highlights – all useful features for facilitating analysis and discussion among students around "knowledge artefacts."



Learning Paths

WebQuests are a useful alternative to an approach that says, “Ready, set, go – Think deep thoughts.” Which is, in effect, what we do when “assigning” complex tasks to novice learners. Thus WebQuests provide cognitive scaffolding to problem-based learning conducted in an online environment. This preamble is meant to contextualize the following statement: the best Learning Paths are those learners unfold themselves. When inquiry is part of the natural life of a classroom and students are empowered with an approach such as CEQ-ALL to support self-managed learning, given time, good things will come. I make this more student-directed emphasis for three reasons.

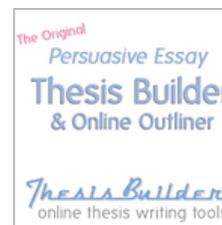
First, Web 2 technologies have further enhanced the personalisation of Web resources to the learner. Second, research in Self Determination Theory and critical thinking demonstrate the greater learning gains that can be achieved when students are self initiated. Finally, we now live in a world where students have unmediated access to virtually everything virtually. If they don’t get practice living and learning in this world, making their own choices, we as educators do them a disservice. If we don’t help them develop a healthy appetite for learning, who will? Thus, although we might feel as though students will “learn more” when we actively shape their activities into tasks, research suggests that what we lose in the trade-off are long-term retention, interest in further study, better achievement, more conceptual understanding and mental health. Win the battle and lose the war? WebQuests delivered as a series of hoops for students to jump through are not “scaffolds,” but little more than teacher-directed learning dressed up as what might be moderately more engaging Web-based learning. Consider using the [CEQ-ALL rubric](#) with students to support their ownership for learning and your role as mentor. **Choice** and **Effort** are the focus during this part of the WebQuest process.

How do these CEQ-ALL inspired Learning Paths actually eventuate? Using an online learning space provides both the private workspace and public audience that are both important to an authentic learning process. By using a WordPress blog or Ning network, a teacher-centered classroom shifts to a flattened learning hierarchy where each member of the community can initiate posts, get feedback, leave comments or contribute new content. In these ways, what is largely an interior and “fudgeable” process becomes part of the “public record” that can be cited or linked-to. Within the online discussions, blog posts and bookmark highlights, students thinking will become visible.



Emerging Expertise

Although phase is listed with a separate heading, Emerging Expertise is really a continuation of the Learning Paths. By giving it special focus, we highlight and acknowledge students' progress along a continuum from novice toward greater understanding and sophistication. What gives this "lift" is the fact that once students develop some confidence within the domain, they can engage in the pursuit of **Quality**. This is a highly rewarding part of the process for teachers because they are at the service of learners who seek their guidance on taking next steps into new learning. Students come with prior knowledge and readiness primed to assimilate a more expert command of the topic to the extent they are able. This is true differentiation. Teachers may use prompting questions, comparisons, multiple examples, etc., all things they have become masters of in their classroom practice. The main difference is that it is much easier to conjure these strategies in response to students' needs, rather than "teaching" the same strategies to students who haven't been given the autonomy or responsibility for learning an authentic task. In earlier versions of the WebQuest framework, this phase of the process was when a group task was used to prompt the transformation of information into understanding. You may still choose to employ graphic organizers like Exploratree or other scaffolds such as Decide Already or the Thesis Builder, but the point is that doing so will be in response to students' demonstrated need, not our lesson plans.



Contribute Innovation

For half a century we have heard the calls for a new kind of professional. The Computer Age, Information Age, Communication Age and now, Digital Age prompt governments, businesses and higher education to express the need for a new kind of employee, the "knowledge worker." Coined by Peter Drucker, the term identifies someone who works for a living at the tasks of developing or using knowledge. These are people valued for their expertise at interpreting information within a specific domain so that the work these people do, expands the body of knowledge in that area. In the realm of classroom learning, many neglect this opportunity to engage learners as intern knowledge workers. These teachers may see the challenge as helping students acquire a body of "known" knowledge supplied by texts and course descriptions. A foundational knowledge is imperative, however, even school children can contribute new knowledge. Indeed, knowledge workers are a desired outcome of our schools, what experience and practice prepares them to achieve this result?

The products of WebQuests and ClassPortals are natural expansions of knowledge. Both strategies demand what can't be copied and pasted: students create a new solution by acquiring information and transforming it into new understanding. This is not to suggest that the work that Middle Years student do adds to the body of knowledge

“entomed“ in our university libraries and research centers. It does mean that as students learn the fundamentals of a subject, they can apply these rules to local situations or unique occurrences. For example, student may have learned about the world of the dinosaurs, but has anyone compiled a list of all the species in the local region that date back to the prehistoric eras? What plants, animals or insects still endure? Which are indigenous? Have any arrived as introduced species? Similarly, high school students may have studied the World Wars. But have any designed and maintained a comprehensive database of contributing factors for last century’s major conflicts? Do any such students write new historical interpretations?

Once students and teachers are comfortable maintaining an online space – whether it is a Web site, blog, wiki, network, podcast, youTube channels, etc. – it can become the vehicle to make innovative contributions to the learning community. Looking from a CEQ-ALL perspective, this is where students engage in the pursuit of **Quality** – demonstrations of new leaning and expertise. These challenges foster the conditions for Csikszentmihalyi’s Flow as well as experience of Seligman’s Authentic Happiness and the wellness that results from Self-Determination Theory. Students’ **Attitudes** now offer insight into the success of their learning and whether they are on the way to a life that knows **Labors of Love**.

(Reflection)

The danger of listing Reflection as the last phase in a process is that it is seen as something tacked on, often pursued as energy wanes and therefore gets completed perfunctorily. Thus the parentheses. This is a reminder that reflection will occur throughout the WebQuest process – as it does through any honest learning experience. The point is that reflection requires high levels of self-awareness, metacognition and the ability to articulate what are often subtle shifts and insights. By engaging in reflection through both private and public postings, students and teachers create a space for this inner dialogue. The WebQuest process when coupled with the CEQ-ALL taxonomy for digital learning attempts to formalize an approach that is true to joyous learning and also fits with the demands for contemporary education.

