
Preface

Using WebQuests in the Social Studies Classroom: A Culturally Responsive Approach provides a practical approach for using WebQuests in the social studies classroom. It helps teachers respond to three important questions facing them today:

How can I be a more culturally responsive teacher?

How can I help make social studies engaging for my students?

How might technology facilitate my work and that of my students?

WHY THIS BOOK?

Today's classroom is more culturally rich than ever before, and new technology tools emerge so fast that often our students are more conversant with "the latest gizmos" than we are. So how do we engage this young, diverse group in subjects they might feel are dry and meaningless? How do we make the social sciences personal and real, so that students embrace the learning needed to help them become good, global citizens?

Our focus is on how teachers can optimise learning, enhance student inquiry, and promote greater intercultural understanding by infusing a simple, yet powerful, technology into their daily classroom work. In the traditional secondary classroom, lessons tend to start, on any given day, from where the lecture left off the previous day. This text provides instruction for using a proven technology and process (the WebQuest) to transport students from the present to the past and back, in and out of personal and cultural connections to history and other social sciences, in order to connect learners directly with curriculum content.

WebQuests are inquiry-oriented, collaborative activities that focus on using Web-based information to enhance higher-level analysis, synthesis

and evaluation. WebQuest assignments pose a stimulating and genuine problem for students to solve; direct them to resources that will provide up-to-date information and provoke analysis; and culminate in achievable, measurable results. Many teachers and educational programs worldwide have adopted this award-winning model for every type of primary- and secondary-level course. A number of scholarly articles in various trade publications describe the WebQuest methodology, but no comprehensive resource exists to provide professional development for teachers who want to develop a variety of models for use during an entire semester of coursework for a specific curriculum.

This book incorporates professional reflection and guided practice tools to facilitate such professional development. Using actual student stories inserted into vignettes that portray typical, culturally diverse classrooms, each chapter walks you through a series of exercises that will help you begin to answer the three important questions previously asked. We intend to enhance, not duplicate, the extensive resources available online for creating WebQuests by incorporating social studies topics (specifically, culturally responsive topics) and using a reflective approach with exercises based on the vignettes.

The first few chapters address today's culturally diverse classroom, the latest technology standards focusing on required skills, and the history and general process for creating WebQuests. Then, each chapter describes how to develop specific WebQuest components by using actual student voices and typical classroom challenges in a series of exercises throughout each module. Comprehensive examples of culturally responsive WebQuests used in the exercises throughout the book are included in five of the chapters.

Teaching cultural sensitivity is important – perhaps more so – even if your classroom is not diverse. And even though the vignettes and exercises in this text focus on experiences of more recent immigrants, the lessons you develop using this approach can just as easily integrate the cultural backgrounds of students from Indigenous, African, Asian or European heritages.

REAL VOICES . . . TYPICAL CLASSROOM CHALLENGES

Soso, a native of Zambia, looks to his father to teach him about his country and cultural background via the Internet “because we really don’t do much of that at all in school”. How can Frank Parker, Soso’s year 10 history teacher, engage his diverse class and make the study of history, economics, health and sociology personal? How can he use technology to focus on complex problem solving to guide these students in civically responsible decision making?

of QuestGarden, an online tool that guides the user through the design process and eliminates the need for web editing skills. QuestGarden and other design tools are covered in the next chapter.

Ideally, WebQuest assignments pose a stimulating and genuine problem for students to solve; direct them to resources that will provide information and provoke analysis; and culminate in an achievable, measurable result. Initially conceived by Dodge (1995) as “an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet” (p 2), the most effective WebQuests have evolved into classroom assignments that “not only involve some higher-level thinking, but require students to ‘transform’ what they have learned” (Dodge, 2005, p 2).

Because so many online tools exist for building, assessing and sharing WebQuests, this book is not intended to duplicate material readily available elsewhere. Our purpose is to provide a baseline understanding of the “why” and “how” of WebQuests, to communicate how this model can be used in the culturally responsive social studies classroom, and to guide you to other resources and tools that will facilitate the process of creating successful assignments.

WHY USE THE WEBQUEST MODEL?

In Chapter 1, we emphasised *imaginative entry*, a strategy that teachers might use to transport students from the present to the past and back or in and out of personal and cultural connections to the social sciences. WebQuests can be an ideal way to initiate imaginative entry. After the stage is set, students can engage in active role-playing, creative analysis and real-world problem solving. History or geography becomes “about them” rather than disconnected facts about others.

Of course, cultural responsiveness and imaginative entry alone are not the only reasons to use this model. Other attributes accounting for its success in the classroom are as follows:

- *Flexibility.* WebQuests can be short term (designed to be completed in one to three classroom periods) or longer term (generally taking from one week to one month to complete). They can cover a single subject or integrate several disciplines, focus on a historical period or a thematic strand and be used in an individual or team environment. For example, researching the relationships between medical advances and historical events can be an effective merging

of science and social studies. Brainstorm other ways in which social studies and other disciplines can be combined, and list them on the following lines.

- *Focus on complex problem solving.* Links to primary source documents and other resources are provided in the assignment to make fact gathering efficient and reliable. The WebQuest uses a constructivist approach in which students move from the facts they research to formulation of ideas and solutions. Because the process incorporates the most effective instructional methods and resources are organised ahead of time, teachers can focus on listening to their students solve problems, rather than act as dispensers of facts. What kinds of real-world problems could you encourage your students to solve in your particular curriculum?

- *Motivating exercises.* Students access a wide range of current, relevant source documents in their quest to answer complex, yet meaningful, questions. The focus on authentic problems transforms assignments from hypothetical, classroom-only tasks to issues that students face in life. WebQuests encourage team problem solving; this dependency on others should result in motivated learning. Because students present their findings to peers, they want to excel.

Culturally Responsive Topics

Many books and papers have been written about culturally responsive teaching; this text is not intended as a primer on that subject. Culturally informed teaching is a lifelong learning process that requires multiple knowledge bases. Before attempting to create a culturally responsive WebQuest, a certain level of cultural competency is recommended. See Suggested Readings for books focused on culturally responsive teaching.

We suggested in Chapter 1 that teachers might think about their students as ethnographers; to do so, become an ethnographer yourself. First, understand your own culture and cultural biases; then, engage your students in conversations to help determine what assignments will be meaningful to them. A few ideas for culturally responsive activities that might be incorporated into a WebQuest are the following:

- using multicultural literature to study social class and power;
- interviewing students' families to develop oral histories of specific world events (historic or current);
- studying comparable events or circumstances in other countries to enhance understanding of Australian history;
- analysing ethnic art, poetry or music vis-à-vis historical events to deepen knowledge of the cultural impact of such events; and
- investigating a range of cultural attitudes toward a similar frame of reference (e.g. family, education, health care, etc.)

Online Resources: Cultural Sensitivity

Here is a sample of some of the many online resources that might be helpful to you in creating assignments that are culturally responsive:

Making Multicultural Australia

- Comprehensive site full of information and activities – <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/>

Diverse Australia Program

- Government initiative to promote cultural, racial and religious tolerance – <http://www.harmony.gov.au>