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Assignment #3

ThinkQuest & MarcoPolo

Internet inquiry is one way in which a teacher can develop a student's ability to research and foster critical thinking through the exploration of specific areas that are personally important to them (Leu & Leu.) These types of projects often work best when done in small groups. ThinkQuest and MarcoPolo are two sites that are useful resources for students who are developing their researching skills on the Internet. Both sites are sponsored by non-profit organizations whose goals are to expand the use of technology into the current curriculum. However, each has a different manner on how these goals will be accomplished.

According to its website, ThinkQuest, which is sponsored by the Oracle Educational Foundation, "assists primary and secondary schools and youth organizations by providing resources, training, and technical support to integrate technology into the learning environment." This project encourages and supports the development of educational websites, which are created by teams of students from all educational levels. This site has two clear main focuses: the competition and the library. Students, ages 9 – 19, build websites based upon topics, which are selected within one of the sites' official

categories. Teams consist of adult mentors or "coaches" who work along side of the students. Students, working in groups of 3 to 6 participants, learn by doing. Teams compete, in one of three age divisions, for a chance to win a prize and have their site included in the [ThinkQuest Library](#). This extremely motivating competition is a prime example of project-based learning and supports the NETS Standards. Coaches act as "guiding partners" and facilitate rather than dictate the student's work. Participation in this competition is easy for students to do. They simply register, form a team, select a topic and then start developing their site. Peers review each other's sites and give feedback. When using an analytical eye in reviewing other student's sites, students will learn critical thinking and evaluation skills. In addition students may review the [ThinkQuest Evaluation Rules](#), which allows them to see the three areas to focus on when creating their website: Educational Content, Web Design and Community. When creating the Educational Content for a site, students should explore different resources including people, printed materials and the Internet. Students should be careful to organize their material and document any relevant resources. Coaches should explain and establish guidelines for citation. Another major component when evaluating is the Web Design. The student's careful preparation and organization when gathering the educational content will assist in the ease of production of the site. Sites will be evaluated on the

overall appearance, media used, structure and navigation and technical quality.

Not only is ThinkQuest an excellent example of Project-based Learning, it is also an example of Collaborative Learning. When forming a ThinkQuest team, keeping in mind certain student characteristics, including academic levels, social skills and special needs, may affect the success of the project. Coaches can divide the group in any fashion. Rather then appointing a team leader, coaches should let the group establish one. For example, each team may have one or two students work in each of the following areas: content, technology, graphics and project management. Teams also may have coordinators for each of these areas. Students must also adjust to working in groups and learn how to interact, share resources and manage conflicts within the group.

While ThinkQuest has two areas of focus – its competition and its library, MarcoPolo focuses on content, professional development and state integration. MarcoPolo's goal is to provide "highest quality Internet content and professional development to teachers and students throughout the United States." MarcoPolo was founded by the MCI Foundation, a non-profit organization, which "focuses on national K-12 education and technology programs that address critical needs of educators, students and parents in an effort to improve educational opportunities and help all students achieve their potential." The project is sponsored by three major organizations –

MCI, Microsoft and the GE Foundation. In order to achieve its goal to provide accurate, up-to-date information, MarcoPolo partners with sites such as Arts Edge, Econ Ed Linke, EdSiteMent, Illuminations, Read*Write*Think, ScienceNetLinks and Xpeditions.   The EdSiteMent site hosts lessons on topics related to Language Arts, History and Social Studies. While the Illuminations site has lessons based on the subject of math. Xpeditions is for geography based lessons and virtual museums. According to the site, the [Teacher Resource](#) section provides tools that enhance teacher's knowledge, increase interest and knowledge from parents, increase student motivation and time-on-task and improve students skills and test scores. The content link directs the user to sites that not only are reviewed by experts, they are also classroom ready and endorsed by leading educational organizations. Like ThinkQuest, MarcoPolo lessons support the NETS Standards, however, it also supports state specific curriculums. All the lessons are Internet-based and can be flexible to accommodate different teaching styles. The lessons are timed and have clear defined lesson objectives. Other teacher resources include the MarcoGram, a monthly newsletter, the Marco Calendar and a Marco Search Engine, where teachers can search by subject, grade and resource type.

The Professional Development section of the MarcoPolo website has teacher training resources. It shows teachers how to effectively integrate MarcoPolo into the classroom, by offering comprehensive courses, providing

training materials and sample lesson plans. MarcoPolo has trained approximately 170,000 educators to date. MarcoPolo follows up with teachers 10 weeks after the training in order to continually improve its content. MarcoPolo also partners will all 50 states and state leadership so that states may integrate MarcoPolo into the state's existing programs.

Both sites provide free access to expert reviewed lesson plans and online resources. While both are highly-motivating resources, ThinkQuest's goal focuses more on student interaction. MarcoPolo's resources lend more toward teacher resources. Both are effective ways to enrich class curriculum. The ThinkQuest Library hosts a variety of websites that can be used to supplement classroom activities. Since these sites are created by students, young people can personally relate to them. Here are a few examples of outstanding student created sites for all different grade levels:

Blood Sweat and Tears: the Story of Child Labor

Free at Last: The Civil Rights Movement in the United States

Breaking Down the Walls

All are excellent examples of students focusing each area in their site including Educational Value, Content and Design, Technical Performance, Community and Global Connection and Collaboration and Team Work. Many of the sites are available in multiple languages, some have surveys and opinion polls and others have games and activities.

In the article, "Research on Internet use in Education," the ISTE's site describes how web-building can influence learning:

> "The Web is a unique form of hypermedia reading and writing environment. Research indicates that students benefit from learning to author Web documents (Smith, 1993). In the process of developing an effective Web site that includes text, sound, graphics, video, color, and interactivity, students develop skills that make them more effective users of Web sites. In addition, as the Web developers' needs gains an awareness of technical issues such as varying download times, they learn to use the Internet for their own research uses with better results."

Web building and design help students in grades K through 12, achieve the goals established by the NET Standards. Building a website can help students have "a sound understanding of the nature and operation of technology systems." And while they become proficient in these new technologies, they are becoming more creative, learning to problem solve and how to more efficiently gather information. The students learn how to self manage their time and consequentially gain knowledge of how to better organize their time. When designing their site, the students are introduced to new technologies that enable them to include sound, graphics, video, etc. on their website. When choosing which method to present information, students must become informed decision makers, on the most efficient ways to present their information. Students must also learn to respect and follow copyright laws. Students will have a better understanding of how to evaluate sources and also how to site them. In addition, during the peer evaluation stage of ThinkQuest, students not only will learn from other students, they will learn how to identify strengths and weakness in their own websites. This self-evaluation is an important tool in a student's development. And,

lastly, students will work with other students to complete their website. During this group work, students must learn how to effectively work with other students and develop tools and techniques for managing conflict and the work load within the group. ThinkQuest provide students with all of these skills, which are essential for a student's well-rounded educational career.

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