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Should Webquests be added to Chapter 12? (Learning Together Virtually)

As I was reading through chapter twelve in the text, it is really focused on the idea of working together or collaborating on a learning task. They use the term CSCL, which stands for Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning.

As I read through table 12.1, they brought up many great ways that learners could work together on a common goal. Blogging, Email, Chat Rooms, and Wikis are some of the great examples that were discussed in this chapter. I have used many of these myself to collaborate with others as a masters degree student. To me, these are ways that people can respond to each other instantly using text or voice. This allows for strong collaboration.

When I think about webquests, I do not feel that they would work in a collaborative setting as the other examples shown in chapter 12. When students complete a webquest, they are going through a set of activities and looking at a pre-determined set of websites to gain new knowledge. They are not interacting with someone else through a computer or working with someone else to use the computer.

I also stopped and looked at this from a classroom teacher perspective. How would you run a webquest as a collaborative learning task? You could have rolls set up (like a literature circle) where each person does one part of the webquest and then reports back to everyone. You could also have two students at a computer at one time. They can take turns using the actual computer until they find the information they want. If I have two students work on it together, I can see behavior issues come about. The student that is not using the computer will now start to fool around and disturb others that are focused on their work.

I had an interesting discussion with a group of teachers that I currently work with. We were discussing how the use of webquests also relies on the Internet working and that the class has access to enough computers. My particular school has only one computer lab with 25 computers shared between 20 teachers. So, you can imagine how far you have to book it out in advance in order to get your students in there. We all agreed that it would be better for our students to work on a webquest independently, which would also help build basic computer skills.

We were also talking about how a webquest could be combined with something else to make it more collaborative. Each student could work on a part, and then discuss what they learned or respond to questions on a blog or wiki. They could ask the readers in a wiki to leave their questions/comments and then respond to the questions asked by their classmates. This is a similar format to what we use in our college level online classes.

In conclusion, I do not feel that a standard webquest could be used a collaborative learning activity. On the other hand, if you were to tweak the standard webquest, you could create a collaborative environment.