Using the Webquest to Engage Learners in the Online Classroom

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Many nursing programs now offer courses and, often, complete programs online. Nurse educators are faced with the challenges of enhancing critical thinking and engaging the learner in an environment often criticized for its linear delivery of material. Most educators use Web sites during their online courses as a means to provide the students with the most up-to-date and relevant information. Students sometimes complain that they are sent to multiple Web sites without a clear understanding of why they are viewing the Web site. Students also report that when they are assigned to search for Web sites, they are not mastering concepts, but solely spending valuable time learning search techniques. The WebQuest is a strategy to engage the student in learning through the use of excellent online resources. The WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity requiring students to explore pertinent Web sites and resources in an organized and purposeful manner. Approaching Web exploration in this way assists students to answer complex questions and/or solve problems requiring higher levels of thinking. In a WebQuest, learners are challenged to use the most current information available on the Web to enhance higher levels of thinking such as critical thinking, decision making, and setting priorities through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. WebQuests can be used to complement traditional and online courses or may stand alone in these learning environments. Dodge and March designed the WebQuest to direct students to the most appropriate Web sites offering the latest information for effective problem solving.

Components of a WebQuest

According to Dodge, there are 6 essential components of a WebQuest. The first component, the introduction, sets the stage, provides background information, and includes an overview of the learning goals. A well-designed introduction is engaging and interesting. For example, an introduction may read, “You are an RN working a weekend night shift in a busy, metropolitan trauma center. While you are caring for 4 other patients, a family member walks into the emergency department and demands help for his father, Mr Smith, who is in the car and unconscious. The physician is on another floor in the hospital managing a cardiac arrest, so you must assess Mr Smith and decide how critical the patient is, what the possible causes of unconsciousness are, and how you will initially manage the patient. You must also prioritize and delegate the care of your 4 other patients.” This introduction informs the learner of their role, setting, and the patient problem(s) requiring exploration. In addition, the overview would state, “The goal of this WebQuest is to identify the possible cause(s) of the patient’s unconsciousness.”

The Task

The most important and difficult component of a successful WebQuest is the task. For the learning experience to be optimal, students must view the task as meaningful. Considerable emphasis should be placed on the goals of the WebQuest and the task(s) necessary for mastery of concepts requiring higher levels of thinking. The task(s) should be purposeful, interesting, and achievable. The nurse educator may require students to complete a variety of tasks during a course such as creating a multimedia presentation, writing a paper, or possibly conducting an asynchronous online discussion with peers from other areas of the country. Creativity is important when developing the task(s). Additional outcomes of the WebQuest could result in the development of patient education materials, concept maps, and teaching presentations. Do not assign a paper as the end result for every WebQuest.

A task related to the prior clinical example could focus on the outcome of identifying possible causes of unconsciousness. The instructions for the task state, “Develop a concept map...”
for determining possible causes of unconsciousness."

Process and Resources

The process component of the WebQuest is step-by-step instructions directing students to the information necessary to complete a WebQuest. Steps include the embedded links, or resources, on the Web that students access to locate pertinent facts necessary to problem solve. Resources can include a variety of materials including accessing electronic databases such as CINAHL through the library Web site, videos, audio recordings, newspapers, or other print media.2,3 The unconscious patient example may include a process section similar to that in the Figure 1.

Using well-designed and creative WebQuests promotes critical thinking and engaged learning by nursing students. WebQuest tasks make use of excellent Internet resources and promote students’ Internet skills. WebQuests are not necessarily the best way to teach factual or procedural information noted in the knowledge domain of learning, but rather offer an innovative approach to engage students at the application and synthesis domain.

A major obstacle in WebQuest design is time requirements for development. The first attempt may require skills new to instructors. Web sites often expire requiring frequent site checks; however, selecting sites that are reputable such as government sites and major organization sites such as the American Heart Association and the Diabetes Association can eliminate this problem. Once the WebQuest is designed, the primary responsibility is keeping the activity updated and current.

Nurse educators must continue searching for creative ways to engage students in learning at the highest levels. The WebQuest allows students to construct their learning experiences. Whether a course is completely online or a hybrid, WebQuests are useful tools for nurse educators. Organizing and framing Internet resources through the WebQuest are a creative approach to helping students problem solve and use higher levels of thinking.

REFERENCES