

## WOMEN IN WORLD WAR II – AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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### ABSTRACT

My teacher/collaborator and I will be creating a one-week lesson on the roles of women during World War II. This lesson will fit into her overall WWII unit. We want to find out how well students score on an assessment of this online lesson as compared to their assessment scores so far this year.

### BACKGROUND

The teacher/collaborator is a first year teacher. She did her student teaching in our school in the spring of 2002, and I found she was a willing user of technology in her classes. We have both observed that many of the units and lessons within a World War II unit focus only on what happened on the battlegrounds in Europe, Africa and the Pacific. Rarely do students learn about how Americans *not* directly involved with the war at the front were affected.

Previously, the teacher has given a variety of assessments at the end of lessons and units. They have included subjective and objective tests and quizzes as well as peer and self-evaluations of projects. We cannot compare past assessment within this unit since Miss Zajac has not taught this before. Therefore, we are interested in seeing if the students “test” any better after completing a lesson using mostly Internet activities.

The students in Miss Zajac’s five classes are eighth graders who were on the same team together last year (with the exception of some new students). She has many ESL students (as does the entire school); therefore, many are slower because of the language barrier. She also has three students involved in our “retention prevention” program; they are in this program because they have exhibited behaviors that have started them on the road to failing. One of her classes is also a mainstreamed class for Learning Disabled students. Not all the students have computers at home, and many of the students are lacking in basic computer and searching skills. Miss Zajac has observed that her students need organization and a variety of activities to cater to the varying learning styles. She

also has observed that most of her students respond to visuals when she teaches.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

“Information literacy – the ability to find and use information – is the keystone of lifelong learning” (*Information Power*, pg. 1). *Information Power* lists and describes three standards of information literacy.

1. The student who is information literate accesses information efficiently and effectively.
2. The student who is information literate evaluates information critically and competently.
3. The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively.

Reed and McNergney (2000) state, “Technology alone will not improve the quality of education, but when integrated with curriculum and instruction, it can be a powerful educational tool.” With those two ideas in mind, it is imperative that we as library media specialists get involved directly with the classroom teacher to help the students become information literate.

WebQuests (and for our purposes, MiniQuests) can be used to effectively promote information fluency. WebQuests are inquiry-oriented, based on a doable, engaging task, use pre-defined resources from the Web (and others), and can be short or long term. (Dodge, <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/bdodge/ttu1.html>) Bernie Dodge at San Diego State University designed the WebQuest Model in 1995. “The instructional goal of a short term WebQuest [MiniQuest] is knowledge acquisition and integration, described as Dimension 2 in Marzano's (1992) Dimensions of Thinking model” (Dodge, <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/bdodge/ttu1.html>). In a MiniQuest, students will read though a considerable amount of information and try to make sense of it. It should only take one to three days, as in our case. WebQuests and MiniQuests are used to support information fluency also because they encourage teachers and librarians to collaborate, thus allowing teachers to get away from teaching searching and evaluating skills in a vacuum. By working with a teacher, the content is taught along side the valuable information literacy skills. Although WebQuests and MiniQuests start with knowledge, the teacher and librarian can use the WebQuest model as a starting point before getting more deeply involved in searching and evaluating the websites, thus promoting Information Literacy.

## THE PLAN

Because her students hadn't spent much time on computers yet this year, we decided to create a MiniQuest. A MiniQuest is a shortened, modified form of the WebQuest. Neither of us knew the Internet searching experiences of the

students, and to simply allow students to search for information without many restraints may have proven to be too much for them, and us, at first. A MiniQuest gives the students the resources to look through to answer a series of questions that then gives them the necessary information to answer an essential question.

Together the collaborating teacher and I spent many hours searching for websites to help explain the roles of women in WWII. We focused on six general categories: factory worker (Rosie the Riveter), pilots (WASPs), military personnel including nurses and WACs or WAACs, journalists and homemakers. We felt this was a feasible number of categories for the students to handle. We would be asking the students to answer three questions about each category. 1) What were the women's responsibilities in this role/position? 2) How many women participated in this role? 3) How did this role help the war efforts? The students would then answer a final, essential question: What role would you have like to have as woman during WWII and why?

The students were in the middle of their WWII lesson. For this unit, the students met in the library computer lab. This was a three-day lesson with their final product being due two days later. On day one, the students were given instructions on how to access the MiniQuest. (This lesson was posted on MyProjectPages.com. (<http://www.myprojectpages.com> - my instructor number is #478.) They were also instructed to write this information down in case they'd like to access this and work on it at home. Students were then introduced to the lesson with two questions: 1) Why did women have to enter the workforce during WWII? 2) What types of jobs did women have to take over for men? After a short class discussion on these two questions, students were told to look at the task. They had to read through a variety of web resources on women's roles and answer three questions about each role. These were the same three questions for each role. The students were given a worksheet in order to write down their answers.

Before students were able to start, we also went over the final project, an essay, and the rubric that would be used to grade the students. We stressed that they should work independently and quietly; this would be a large portion of their grade. They were also instructed to take notes while reading the websites because the answers on their worksheet should be a culmination of all the websites they read. The classroom teacher also wanted the worksheets to be in complete sentences, so it was imperative that the students take notes. We then went over the final essay and made sure they understood what the requirements were for this. The students were told they had two days in the library to read through the resources, and a third day in the library to begin their essays. The essays would be due on the fifth day. For us this was Monday through Wednesday in the library, with the essays due on Friday. We answered any questions the students had, and they began working independently.

On day two, after answering any questions the students had, they began working independently again. They logged into the MiniQuest and began reading resources and taking notes. On the third day, the classroom teacher collected the worksheets, and the students began writing their essays. They were instructed to use the rubric for guidance and to refer back to any of the websites to aid them in writing their essay. Students were encouraged to type their essay directly into a word processing program; only a few chose to write it out long hand then type it into the computer.

## ASSESSMENT

The basic assessment we used is a rubric. This rubric includes three sections: participation, worksheets, and writing. The classroom teacher designed the original rubric. The rubric was assigned point values in this rubric. One to four points were given in each area. Within the rubric, students could see exactly what was expected of them in all areas. When I used MyProjectPages.com to post the lesson, the rubric in the assessment area did not allow for us to assign points, but instead labeled each area as Advanced, Intermediate, Beginner and No Attempt. The teacher could still assign a point value to each area of the rubric in order to obtain an actual score for the project. The rubric in MyProjectPages.com requested a percentage to be assigned to each area. We decided the participation and worksheets would each be worth 25%, and the final essay would be worth 50%. We split it this way because we felt the process was as important as the product.

The rubric would only be one way to evaluate the students. In order to evaluate their participation, as outlined in the rubric, the classroom teacher and I continuously circulated within the computer area to assess how each student was progressing. Were they using their time wisely? Were they on task with the resources given and not going out into other sites? Were they working independently and not bothering others? The classroom teacher kept a notebook with her and jotted down her observations of the students while they worked.

A final assessment should have been (but was thought of too late) a survey of the students to see what their reactions were to this assignment. Would what they have to say about using the Internet contrast much from what we observed in class? (i.e. Would those students who were always on task interested in what they were doing or just good students trying to get the assignment finished?)

## RESULTS

Some of the things I observed included students on task and working diligently. They seemed to take easily to using the Internet as a resource. Other students had a difficult time with this idea. Some even said they'd rather be

reading a book. I'm not quite sure what different reading skills are needed to read websites; I'd be interested to find out if there are any. For many students, it was just laziness. Their teacher shared with me that these same students were often off task in the classroom. For them, using the Internet as a resource did not make a difference in their behavior. I believe many of the students who were actively involved in reading the information in the websites and navigating to various links did so because of the engaging nature of the Internet. Students aren't just reading; they are clicking, scrolling and linking. They take an active, rather than submissive role in the learning. I also wondered if we might not have given them enough time to search through the websites. I am a firm believer that a student will take as long as she/he has to finish a project. So, if we only give them three days to work in the library, they will settle in and work immediately. Perhaps this was not the case.

I asked the collaborating teacher to share her thoughts and observations with me. This is what she had to say:

The web-quest was an excellent activity that suited all of my students' needs. Many of my students do not have a lot of background in technology nor do they have access to a computer at home. This activity engaged my students to participate in linguistic, visual, kinesthetic and interpersonal learning. It was interesting to see how students reacted to such an activity. Many students were very interested and needless to say did not complain. I do have to say that for the students who seemed a bit confused about how they [could] write the final product- an essay on what role they would have liked to have had as a woman in World War I - actually ended up doing very well. I have received a lot of feedback from the students that they have learned more about women in history doing this activity than they have had in all of their school years combined. Women and their contributions to history are often overlooked; I am glad that this gave my class as well as myself a chance to see the other side of the coin, so to speak.

All of my students turned in their worksheet. Many of them did not write in complete sentences. Approximately 75% of them did not. In that case I took a whole letter grade off. Other than that though, I was very surprised at the information they wrote. They wrote a lot, and it seemed that they really got into it. However, they were students that cut and paste a lot of the information or copied directly from the websites; in that case I too took an additional letter grade off and had them re-write it.

During 1st, 2nd and 4th periods, our morning classes, there were: 35 A's/12 B's/10 C's and 6 D's. During our 7th, 8th and 9th period classes- our confused groups- they surprisingly did much better. There were: 38 A's/ 16 B's/ 5 C's and 2 D's. I have students that have had significant changes in their grades. I was surprised at students who usually get D's or never turned in their

work that actually got an A! I think that because this was a different type of assignment for them, [and] they were given another chance to do well.

(Graphs are being sent in two different attachments)

### FINDINGS

As I conceived and then implemented this lesson, I was truly excited. Here is a “new” concept (to me) for teaching information literacy along side of content. It is so important to not teach “computers” in a vacuum. Rather than the technology requirements driving the curriculum or vice versa, teachers could develop WebQuests and MiniQuests and take care of both technology and curriculum standards side by side. I was also eager to look at the roles of women in World War II. This is an area that really isn’t covered in the textbooks to any real extent. So with two great ideas, or so I thought, I began searching for websites to help apply these ideas.

My original expectations were that the student would latch on to this instantaneously. I was so sure they’d love using the Internet as their textbook. These students so often go right to the computers to research and balk if I suggest looking for the information in a book, so I thought naturally they’d immediately share in my excitement. This was not the case. I found that despite the components of the lesson, if the instructions are not given carefully and clearly, the students will have questions.

Overall, the original purpose of the lesson was to incorporate using the Internet to involve the students in engaging tasks to create a final product, all which includes both critical thinking and information literacy. I believe we succeeded. Although the actual grades may not reflect what I had initially hoped for, I still believe that we succeeded in helping the students become more comfortable with using the Internet as a significant part of their learning. There is still more work to come. The students must now graduate to using the Internet to accessing and evaluating information to truly become information literate. Also, my cooperating teacher is only one person; I now need to branch out and collaborate with other teachers from other teams and disciplines. Slowly but surely students and teachers will become more comfortable utilizing the numerous ways the Internet can help them in accessing the information needed to complete their education.

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