

#### USING THE WEB FOR ACTIVE LEARNING

The classroom is only one place in which learning takes place and there are more autonomous ways of learning. Developments in technology, increases in demand but not in resources, and research into learning are all changing the face of how, where and when to learn.

Two factors coalesce - the understanding that learning is exploring and the ability of technology to provide wide spaces for exploration. In these two senses the use of technology complements and extends the learner-centered methodology. The main advantage is that learners can access the source material in their own time, work through the material at their own pace, choosing topics and subject areas to match their own interests and do all this without necessarily having to interact with a teacher. In other words, learners are in control of their learning and have increased choice.

The Internet is a tremendous educational resource. It presents educators and learners with excellent opportunities, but the resources alone are not enough.

To get students to use the Web productively, teachers are going to have to play an active role. They might require that students "study" specific Web resources or they might require students to use the Web to gather resources to generate a product (for example, a paper on a specific topic). These approaches may provide an **incremental advantage** over existing practices in that students have access to many more resources and can access these resources more efficiently than is presently the case, but they do not offer a **transformational advantage** (Grabe, Grabe, 1998). Student experiences would still emphasize similar classroom activities and the same cognitive skills, even without the Internet. The transformational advantage of Internet activities would be realized if students were engaged in different learning activities emphasizing cognitive skills that have some unique value. These skills might be unique in emphasizing new areas, such as information literacy, or in finding ways to effectively target skills that have always been valued, but that are difficult to develop in some content areas, such as critical thinking and problem solving.

Here is somewhat different way to think about how you might want to use Web resources. Consider how Web access might contribute to an **active learning** environment. The Web can provide factual answers to simple objective questions, but it can also provide information that students can use in trying to resolve

complex problems and questions with no definitive answers. Using Web resources in the investigation of complex problems is a good way to integrate the use of technology into nearly any content area and a way to take on challenges that students can attack collaboratively. Giving students the opportunities to use knowledge and skills in ways that are authentic to the discipline provide valuable opportunities for assessment.

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