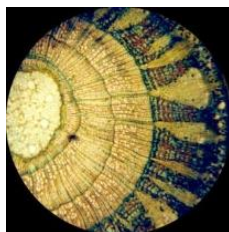


The criteria for the evaluation of educational sites

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The continuous development of the internet has as a result the flow of information, at every level of society and primarily in education, to have rates hardly recorded. At the same time, the plethora of available e - sites for teachers worldwide, beyond the possible new offer of knowledge, gives opportunities for multiple and multilateral exploitation.

However, the lack of clear criteria for their evaluation easily leads teachers and learners to misunderstandings and often to rejection and aphorism of the entire medium of ICT. It is therefore necessary that the information offered, to be protected from dangerous and incorrect information.

The evaluation criteria are a proposal, a guide that needs to be activated, so every navigation in educational sites to be able to be used easily, so for them to be properly evaluated.



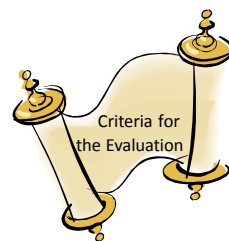
INTERNET AND WEBSITES

The use of the Internet today raises the bar for teachers at all levels in terms of teaching methods, presentation and use of knowledge. The huge advancement in the internet in recent years has as a result its enrichment with multiple sites of educational content which may include news updates from the world of education, information about events, conferences, etc. , articles, discussion fora for teachers and ideas and recommendations that can be used by teachers in the teaching practice. These websites target/refer to teachers, students , parents, etc., ie to a particular audience that is directly related to the sensitive area of education and literacy. The creators of these sites are government bodies, educational institutions, educational groups, individual teachers etc.

Teachers and students often surf the internet looking for information that will help them in a job assignment, a valuable information, a picture, a video, a lesson plan, an educational software or even a good idea. At the same time they discover an abundance of information offered, that they are often unable to assess whether what they see actually responds to their original search.

RECORDING-EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL WEBSITES

Freedom of expression on the internet gives everyone the right to publish educational material. But are these teachers aiming at trustworthy sites? Can they be used by the target audience?



It takes special criteria that will help us to evaluate the sites and decide when one is valid and usable. Many of the criteria referring to websites of other subject areas may be included in the evaluation of educational websites. However, we must consider these criteria in a different way, as teachers.

The purpose of this research is to help teachers and students to learn to evaluate the internet in order to assimilate in the best possible way the information they seek. Teachers especially should assess the site that will present in the classroom and the content that they will suggest for studying to their students.

Based on these findings, the literature and personal experience, we reached to the following criteria for evaluating educational portals that refer in two key areas:

- a) **the content** (target audience, credibility, authenticity, objectivity, completeness, updated)
- b) **the technical aspects** (aesthetics, navigation, accessibility) .

a) The CONTENT

Content refers to the theme or the ideas that are included in the website. The base of a healthy educational portal has to be the quality content of information. More specifically:

1) Audience-Target people

The site must clearly state the academic level at which it is addressed and contain the content and activities that match the academic level of the operator 's website. Detail should be given and clear answers to the following :

The training material is designed for: Students, Teachers , Parents , Education officials; Does the educational materials indicate the grade , the classroom and the lesson ? Can the educational content be used in teaching practice? Is the information contained herein suitable for the level of students to whom they refer to? Do the themes mentioned for the first time, contain the necessary explanations or pictures or drawings? To what extent is there special information for the teacher? Does the site accept and encourage teachers to publish their work in this site?

2) Validity-Origin

Some of the most important data for the evaluation of a site is the accuracy of sources and the content, being parameters necessary to be adhered to at all times. There are many factors to be considered when assessing the reliability of an educational portal:

Start by examining the page itself. Look at the web address (URL). What kind of domain (.edu, .gov, .org, .net, .com) is it? This doesn't always help, but it may provide an indication of the sponsor. Is it a government site, school resource, museum, commercial or private web project?

Can one find, for every paper, the corresponding name of the author? Are there pieces of information about the authors of the website (e-mail, profession)?

Is the author an authority on the subject? Do you know who the author of the information is? If it is unsigned, is it posted in a usually authoritative place? If the author is known, what do you know about the author? Is the author an expert either in the subject matter or alternatively in observation and evaluation?

Note that one place to look for the author is in meta tags - a form of metadata (information about information) that may be included within the unseen HEAD structure of an HTML page. If they are included, they are a sign that the author took some care to make the information easier to find by search engines. Well written meta tags add credibility to the information.

Is there information and data for the designer and the person responsible for the website and are there any contact details? Are there sections like *About Us*, *Our Objectives*, etc.)

The function of the website depends on:

- a) Own resources b) Service c) Foundation or Club d) Funding and:

It is a collective or individual work? Is the person, someone on his/her own, the state or in collaboration with a University? Who owns copyright?

Papers have to refer their sources and the visitor has to be able to send comments.



3) Originality and Usability

Are there primary pieces of information not found elsewhere in the network? After the "opening" of a site, we spontaneously evaluate whether it is appropriate for what we are looking for. For this evaluation we answer the questions: is the issue we came across to, the one shown in the search engine or in the advertisement or the link that referred us there? Does its information and the content analyze the issue in depth? Are there any functional links for the above study?

The site must contain a wealth of information and deserves more than one visit. Should have links to other websites relevant to the same topic. The language is developmentally appropriate for its targeted audience. The use of text and graphics as links is appropriate to level of understanding of targeted audience.

Is there a requirement for special software and, if so, can the software be accessed or downloaded easily? In the case of compressed files, is it clear how to gain access to the files?



drinking from a fire hose

4) Objectivity

The content of education portals should be objective , without commercial , political , gender or racial bias. What is declared is the objectives, the motivations and aspirations of the site. Is there a definite relationship between the objectives, processes and learning projects with the content of the site? The way in which the related content is presented, is it compatible with the general educational purposes of the website?

5) Independence

Maturation should not be subject to political or other procedures, guidance and censorship, keeping only its educational orientation.

If the publisher is unknown or a person needs extra care to check the information.

6) Cover-Completeness

It is necessary for the educational portals to include links to other sources of information. The proposed connections must be reliable and annotated so to provide the necessary information to the reader who seeks additional information

7) Update

It is essential for an educational portal to maintain an updated content. Teachers should be able to draw the most current and accurate information. Given that the sites can quickly and economically be informed compared to textbooks or other printed sources, they can be the best source of current information.

The date of the last update must be indicated, not just for the whole site but for each individual entry as well.

b) The TECHNICAL ASPECTS

"Technical aspects" refers to the processes that control a person's ability to access the content. The visual presentation of information should be accessible and easy, while navigation is the key to successful information retrieval via the Internet.

**1) Aesthetic appearance- presentation**

One of the main features of an educational website is the aesthetic or visual appearance. The right combination of text and graphics will encourage users to stay in the area or to explore it in detail. The text must be easily readable concerning the font, size and color. On the other hand, the use of multiple graphics increases the file size and as a consequence increases the time that it takes for the content to be displayed. So, the graphics on the site must serve a purpose and not be too big. The site could be interactive - there is something to DO on the site (game, fill-out forms, chat, newsgroup/message board, etc.).

The presentation of the information in a site is important not just because it sets the initial impression of the user but also because it reflects how easily information can be of use.

The site's design and added features (graphics, sounds, video, databases, Active X, Shockwave, JavaScript and Java Applets) should not hinder the educational use of the site, but enhance it and should not deflect the user from his purpose.

If the site is multimedia, consider creativity, quality of the image and sound, and interactivity. Is multimedia appropriate for the site?

2) Navigation

The navigation refers to the ease with which the user can move throughout the site. Well designed pages contain a home page or a main page that acts as a starting point from which the user can base his quest. Is it easy to navigate through the site? Links are clearly marked and self – explanatory, making navigation intuitive?

The home page must contain some form of direct connection with all other parts of the site.

The navigation in an educational portal, we may say that it is user friendly if "useful content is less than 3 clicks away from the main page" (Oregon, 1997-2001).

It is important to have a good classification of issues for quick search. It may also be good to have an internal search engine for the contents of the site.

3) Access ability

It has to be indicated whether access to educational portal requires additional software (java applets, Flash Player, plug-ins).

The site's loading time should be small. The pages should be loaded quickly. If you're uploading a large file, the designer of the site should inform you about the time required.

Generally, access to content in an educational portal can:

a) be free b) require subscription c) ask for personal information (name, email address) in order to access the educational content. A good educational website should not be for profit.

The evaluation criteria described in this paper were compiled based on the needs of students, teachers, and educational systems. The evaluation of educational sites is important and the criteria mentioned, constitute a starting point, since research on this issue has not gone far enough in Greece or even internationally.



4) Useful applications to the classroom

An important factor in the evaluation of educational sites is whether they have educational software relevant to the learning object of the site. In the ever increasing use of new technologies by teachers, it becomes increasingly necessary to use computer tools for teaching. At the same time, available videos or recorded lesson plans or explanatory illustrations or links to other relevant educational applications, increase the usefulness of the site.



INFORMATION SEARCH ON THE WEB



When we use a Web Search Engine to find material on a research topic, we may think that we have found more than enough information to write a paper. But if we only search the Web for information that is available for free, we may be missing important Web resources that are not free.

There are many valuable resources such as University databases, electronic journals, a wide variety of scholarly journals, professional association publications and electronic books that are not available to the general public. Some need a subscription to have access to the resources that are reliable and authoritative and could be the very best resources on our topic.

In any case, the knowledge of evaluation criteria of a Site is now a necessity for all teachers of all the educational levels.

THE FIVE W'S OF WEB SITE EVALUATION

WHO

Who wrote the pages and are they an expert?
Is a biography of the author included?
How can I find out more about the author?

WHAT

What does the author say is the purpose of the site?
What else might the author have in mind for the site?
What makes the site easy to use?
What information is included and does this information differ from other sites?

WHEN

When was the site created?
When was the site last updated?

WHY

Why is this information useful for my purpose?
Why should I use this information?
Why is this page better than another?

WHERE

Where does the information come from?
Where can I look to find out more about the sponsor of the site?

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Evaluating WEB pages

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