How to do blended learning—finding and evaluating web resources

How do instructors choose good web resources for learning?
This can, as you know, be an overwhelming task. It used to be easy to come up with a list of web resources for literacy students because there were not that many choices. Now there are so many good places to learn on the internet and the impossibility of keeping up with new sites and changing links makes any list out of date almost as soon as it is published.

Here are two places to find good lists:

Larry Ferlazzo indexes websites for instructors by subject and purpose in his Best Of series (larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/about/my-best-of-series/).

The web resource reviews at **Free Technology for Teachers** (www.freetech4teachers.com/) are not as well indexed as Larry Ferlazzo's but Richard Byrne often describes how he uses the resources with students and even though they are not quite the same audience as literacy learners, this insight into practice can be quite useful.

How do you know when you are using the best site?
You don't. But you can easily know of you are using the best site for your class. If the learners like the site, are engaged when they are using it and report that it helps them meet their learning goals, it is the best site. You can spend hours researching and reviewing websites for your class. When you find a site that works, stop.

Is the information reliable?
There are a few things you have to think about when considering this.

- **Bias**. Why was the site created? Who created it? Was it someone neutral, or was it someone who wanted to send a specific message?
- **Authority**. Is the writer qualified to speak on the subject? Information posted on the web is not always reviewed the same way printed material is. Good sources are: museum, library, and archives sites; government sites; non-profit organizations; well-known information sources such as Britannica.com and Merriam-Webster Online.
- **Primary source**. Primary sources lets readers interpret the original material for themselves.

Is the site clear and easy to use? Will the learners in your class be able to access the information easily? Be careful of sites that take a long time to load. This can waste valuable time. Also, check if you can print the material easily.

Is there advertising? Be careful of sites with too much advertising, especially if you think that the site has been created to attract you to a business. They are less likely to be reliable.

Title:

Evaluated by:

Description of contents

Activities

Skills	**Level**

Can I record progress?

Can I print?

Can I add my own content?

Can I adjust features, e.g. sound?

Can I set levels of difficulty?

What other resources could I use with this site or program?

Ideas for use:

Here is some advice about reviewing sites from the Library and Archives Canada (www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/education/008-3043-e.html)

Learners can build lists too

Start with this **HOW** question:

How easy is it to find and understand information on this site?

If the answer is "very easy" or "quite easy," go to the 5 Ws.

If the answer is "difficult," ask,

Is it worth it? Is this information available anywhere else?

If the information is essential and is not available anywhere else, go to the 5 Ws.

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5 Ws 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 information is included and does this information differ from other sites?

WHEN

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

WHERE

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

WHY

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

Readability (www.readability.com/)
makes websites easier to read.
http://www.workrights.ca/content.php?sec=2
versus
https://www.readability.com/articles/reulseqz/

Quietube (quietube.com/)
lets you see videos without distractions
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PI2pFw5avc
versus
http://quietube.com/v.php/http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PI2pFw5avc