

## **The Virtual School House**

### **(Website review)**

**Reviewer:**

**Martha A. Sanchez**

Indiana 182, Col. Napoles

Mexico D.F. C.P. 03810

[martha@entrenate.dgsca.unam.mx](mailto:martha@entrenate.dgsca.unam.mx)

**Site URL:**

<http://metalab.unc.edu/cisco/schoolhouse/>

**Site title:**

The Virtual School House

**Objectives of the site:**

The objectives are not stated in the site.

**Intended audience:**

The site seems to be useful for a wider range of people. On one hand, it could be for kids or teenagers, on the other hand, teachers can find useful links there.

**Domain related aspects:**

It is supposed to be educational site (at least it gives this impression), but it does not provide focus on a particular subject. The area covered is very wide. The site provides links to variety of topics without real connection between them.

The content of the site is not original. It looks like a bookmarks file sorted into a tree.

**Structure of the site:**

"The Virtual School House" site is divided into seven sections:

- Classrooms
- Principal's office
- Library
- Art room
- Computer lab
- Teacher's lounge
- Playground -links for kids

Each of the sections contains usually five to ten links on a particular subject. The section headed "Classrooms" is a collection of particular topics (e.g. journalism, economics) ordered alphabetically. "Library" seems to be a valuable resource of links to famous libraries and bookshops. "Art room" gathers a few links to galleries, but without any guidance and introduction.

The site can also connect potential visitors to other schools on the web (starting from elementary level).

"Computer lab" offers a few links introducing to technical issues of the web. "Teacher's lounge" provides links to resources for teachers of various disciplines.

**Usefulness and richness of each topic:**

It is difficult to evaluate the content of links gathered in the site, but I suppose "The Virtual School House" did such evaluation beforehand. Generally it seems that there is a collection of links under different subjects, but not leading to any whole idea on those subjects.

As far as the educational value is concerned I would qualify this site only as a reference resource and only for very general purposes rather than deep analysis of topics.

**Connectivity:**

I did not have any problem in accessing the site. It was tested through internet-direct and modem connections and both worked well. No special software was needed to access this site. Not all external links were analysed to make this statement general. There are no special browser requirements for this site.

**Interface related aspects:***The layout of the website*

What I found did not correspond to what I expected. The metaphor (using the map of school) is good, but since the objectives are not defined, the results of the site are not predictable.

*Site structure*

The structure of the site is not clear as soon as it is entered. First impression is - what to do next? There is no introduction to the content. One does not know what the image map is leading to.

The background colour is non-intrusive, fonts are readable, and images (mainly the bars) are viewable. In fact, apart from the image map on the title page, the site does not have any special graphical style. The first graphic is very interesting and an appropriate metaphor, but there is no continuation on the following pages. Pages rely only on text with links based on white background.

As far as the sufficiency of information is concerned, one can observe that the explanation of the links is not complete.

*Navigation*

The site is easy to navigate. There are no icons or some fun design to make it attractive. It has basic hyperlink navigational aids.

*Search facilities*

Not available.

**Overall issues:**

It is not clear who supports the site, but looks like it is university based. Contact details of site owner(s) are not available explicitly, though they can be seen in the other links suggestion form.

**Other comments:**

The main page is really good. I appreciate the metaphor. The site could be improved by defining at the beginning what is the main aim and focus of the site. This would save time of potential viewers looking for particular information. The continuation of school metaphor in an interesting way which would benefit overall graphical design.

I see a good effort of The Virtual Schoolhouse creators in collecting all the reference links. I guess there is still a big potential to be explored by this site together with action towards better guidance provided to people visiting it.