USING WEB QUESTS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH

T. Tadeush
(Mogilev State A. Kuleshov University,
the department of foreign languages)

Web Quests are a kind of learner-centered online teaching and learning. They are both resource based and activity based. These features are highlighted and the structure of a Web Quest is described.

English teaching has been incorporated to the use of internet and virtual reality to build up language learning which is attracting academic interest.

Technology has become an integral part of higher education instruction. With the increased use of instructional technology, web-based instructional resources are increasingly integrated into the curriculum.

Nowadays, computers and the Internet play an increasingly important role in the lives of learners around the world. The Internet is a particularly significant tool for learners because it provides them with authentic language input.

However, recent research indicates that students are easily frustrated when they interact with text resulting from an Internet search because they are not instantly gratified in their rapid search for immediate answers and may adopt a "snatch and grab philosophy". They often make hasty, random choices with little thought and evaluation. Web Quests are designed to overcome this problem.

What is a Web Quest?

Web Quests, originally created by Bernie Dodge at San Diego State University in 1995, are self-contained "inquiry-oriented" activities on the web. Web Quests are "designed to support the learners' thinking at levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" by using information provided in authentic web resources that are used in the tasks constituting it.

Therefore, focus is not basically on content, but on using content as a means for developing thinking skills by engaging learners in tasks that require them to practice those skills [1; 2].

Structure of a Web Quest

Web Quests have a clearly-defined structure. However, this structure should only be taken as a basic guideline and teachers should design their Web Quests to suit the needs and learning styles of their students. There are usually four main sections of a Web Quest.

Introduction: This stage is normally used to introduce the overall theme of the Web Quest. It involves giving background information on the topic and, in the language learning context, often introduces key vocabulary and concepts which learners will need to understand in order to complete the tasks involved.

Task: The Task section of the Web Quest explains clearly and precisely what the learners will have to do as they work their way through the Web Quest. The task should be motivating and interesting for the learners, and should be firmly anchored in a real-life situation.

Process: The Process stage of a Web Quest guides the learners through a set of activities and research tasks, using a set of pre-defined resources. These resources in the case of a Web Quest-are predominately web-based, and are usually presented in clickable form within the task document (it's important to bear in mind that it's much easier to click on a link than to type it in with any degree of accuracy).

In the case of a language based Web Quest, the Process stage of the Web Quest may introduce (or recycle) lexical areas or grammatical points which are essential to the Task. The Process stage of the Web Quest will usually have one (or sometimes several) "products" which the learners are expected to present at the end. These "products" will often form the basis of the Evaluation stage.

Evaluation: The Evaluation stage can involve learners in self-evaluation, comparing and contrasting what they have produced with other learners and giving feedback on what they feel they have learnt, achieved, etc. It will also involve teacher evaluation of the same products, and good Web Quests will give guidance to the teacher for this particular part of the process.

Why use Web Quests?

There are many reasons for using Web Quests in the classroom. Web Quests have some advantages over textbook based instruction. In traditional classrooms, students read a text or listen to lectures; they are usually passive knowledge receivers. Web Quests, unlike traditional classroom activities, are learner-centered tasks which require active learning.

Web Quests require students to think at higher levels. Besides reading and remembering, students apply, synthesize, analyze and evaluate. Web Quests can also include co-operative activities in which students work

together as a whole group or in small groups to reach one outcome such as Wikis. They are a relatively easy way for teachers to begin to incorporate the Internet into the language classroom since no specialist technical knowledge is needed either to produce or use them. They encourage higher level thinking skills (e.g. comparing, classifying, inducing, deducing, analyzing errors, constructing support, abstraction, analyzing perspectives, etc.).

After students have researched and read a number of texts or parts of texts, they transform information into a new product. Web Quests therefore, require students to apply knowledge while completing their task. They are both motivating and authentic tasks and encourage learners to view the activities they are doing as something "real" or "useful". This inevitably leads to more effort, greater concentration and a real interest in task achievement. This can be a greater motivator than outdated course books and other such teaching materials.

Web Quests provide a natural setting for promoting respect for diversity.

Working together students encounter diverse opinions from others as well as among their own group members in their effort to work together to facilitate a deeper understanding about the topic. Diverse opinions and new ways of understanding and knowing are brought to the forefront, and similarities and differences aid in understanding and solving the problem.

Designing Web Quests. There are five principles for designing a Web Quest.

1. Learning is promoted when learners are engaged in solving real-world problems.

2. Learning is promoted when existing knowledge is activated as a foundation for new knowledge.

3. Learning is promoted when knowledge is demonstrated to the learner.

4. Learning is promoted when new knowledge is applied by the learner.

5. Learning is promoted when new knowledge is integrated into the learner's world. These principles are used as guidelines in designing Web Quests. [2]

However, you decide to work with web quests, you should find that well-chosen and motivating topics, coupled with up-to-date websites and access to the wealth of material on the internet will provide lively, interesting and learning-rich classes for you and your learners.

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