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Annotations

The article emphasizes the importance of using authentic materials for language learning, such as real-life text and speech, rather than simple drilling-type computer programs. WebQuest, a term coined for integrating the Internet into language teaching, allows students to engage in comprehensive and interactive activities using web-based resources. These activities are praised for their ability to motivate students and engage them in hands-on learning, contrasting with traditional rote exercises.

Furthermore, the article highlights how WebQuests can enhance critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills, which are essential in language learning and real-life applications. Challenges related to access to technology and the internet, such as limited connectivity and availability of computers, are discussed. The quality of WebQuest tasks is crucial, emphasizing authenticity, higher-order thinking, clear task outlines, and the importance of feedback for effective learning.

Assessment of WebQuests should focus on the quality of work rather than completion, with rubrics being a valuable tool for formative evaluation. WebQuests offer opportunities for higher-level thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, resembling real-life learning experiences.

There is little argument that computers can enrich the process of learning. However, its potential for language learning won’t materialize through simple drilling-type computer programs. Language learners need to process authentic data in order to improve their proficiency and comprehension. This data comes in the form of real-life text in the target language or speech from individuals in real-life situations. The key point is that web-based learning provides necessary authentic materials and real-life communication.

Key Words: WebQuest, authentic materials, motivation, egagement, critical thinking, problem-solving, access to technology, quality tasks, rubrics, higher-level learning

The term «WebQuest» surfaced as a result of comprehensive research on incorporating the

Internet into language teaching. Web-based learning has gained a lot of interest since the mid-1990s, and there are various reasons for using web material to support learning. There are many potential benefits of using the Internet and other technologies. Since the computer can provide access to authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, and up-to-the-minute information from around the world, it is clear why the medium could be seen as a valuable resource for language learning. Additionally, the comprehensive and interactive nature of web pages will engage learners. Students are more likely to be interested in learning about a specific topic if the topic is featured on a web page that can be accessed in the classroom. Then the web provides numerous resources for teachers of English.

The activity is said to provide a more challenging and hands-on approach to learning, which is in contrast to the usual rote, grammar-based exercises often found in some ESL textbooks. It is felt by BDD that this type of challenging activity is actually ideal for higher level students who are often presented with (in the words of one of the BDD interviewees from Turkey), «watered-down» material in their efforts to make it understandable.

The first benefit of using web quests mentioned by its advocates is that it provides an integrated activity which is highly motivating. Little light has been shed on what constitutes «motivation» and «motivating» in the literature, but the underpinning idea appears to be that the higher the level of motivation something generates in a pupil, the more likely they will be engaged, and the more likely they are to learn something.

A good WebQuest will also connect with the lives of students, helping them to see the clear relevance to their own future learning goals. A relevant and engaging learning experience produces kids with more discovered understanding and knowledge, the ultimate goal of education. Step by step, an effective WebQuest can produce superior performance in basic skills, and because it is more at goal than traditional instruction, will develop students who are more adept at applying their knowledge and skills in real life.

In today’s world of education, what is not stated is often assumed to be unimportant. It is well known that children will learn more if they are interested in what they are doing. Unfortunately, a great deal of what is presented in school is uninteresting to students. WebQuests can help to change this. An engaging WebQuest will draw students in and make steel them for the quest ahead. Because of the authentic nature of the tasks and the guidance of the inquiry process, students may become extremely focused on completing the final product. All of this increases the time on task for students in the targeted learning experience.

Engagement and motivation almost always influence performance. They’re key to thinking and learning. When we’re engaged and motivated, we’re pushed to expend more time and energy, leading us to make more discovered connections, to consider problems/issues more thoroughly, and to be more open to developing new skills and knowledge.

The critical thinking skills are undoubtedly relevant to acquire the information literacy of the internet while supporting the web quest activity. Most web quests have a similar format that guides the

students through the process of completing the task. This usually involves the presentation of a problem to be solved, a task, and a final product. Various students who have employed the use of web quests have shown significant development in cognitive abilities due to the well-structured scaffolding and cognitive support embedded in web quest activities. Cognitive advancement has been seen to affect qualitative improvements in the learning process and knowledge construction of individual students. In correspondence with the cognitive abilities, decision-making skills and effective problem-solving strategies have also improved with the use of web quests. Decision-making and problem-solving skills are fundamentally important in the present globalization to solve various complex problems. The ability to find information and critically analyze it to make an informed decision is a key feature in all decision-making processes. This skill transcends to problem-solving strategies in the sense that information construction and organization in decision-making skills are used to solve a specific problem or task. Coming back to language learning, given the applied nature of decision-making and problem-solving strategies, it seems that learning a language with the goal to use the language to solve problems and find ways to complete tasks is a reflection of critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.

There is a substantial amount of literature promoting the use of technology for enhancing language learning, claiming that it can provide a medium through which students can contextualize language use and build upon the knowledge they gain in the classroom. Warschauer and Kern argue that it is literacy, and not just the acquisition of linguistic forms, that is the goal of language learning, and that the computer can be an ideal tool to promote the various types of authentic literacy activities, such as interaction, functional writing, writing for reflective understanding, and writing to create a text. They also predict that new technologies will force a shift of language teaching from its current focus on the imparting of knowledge of the language to the provision of authentic language use experiences. Essentially, it is widely agreed that students can access a wealth of information on the internet, which for a myriad of tasks and exercises, can be used to promote autonomous learning.

The effectiveness of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) can be evaluated through the comparison of the ways in which students using traditional methods access, process, store, and later retrieve information, and the far more engaging and interactive ways in which they can do this through the use of technology. Warschauer and Healey (1998) observed a study carried out in French classes, where it was found that students were significantly more enthusiastic about the language when technology was involved, and after spending the same amount of time learning the language as the control group, made gains in linguistic proficiency. This was just a beginner’s level course, but it is clear through much other research that students are motivated to learn languages to higher levels at their own pace when technology is involved.

There is no limit to the amount of irrelevant or inappropriate material that is available on the internet. It is therefore crucial that a teacher is able to guide his/her students to sites which are suitable for their age and English level. Unfortunately, this can be extremely time-consuming as a teacher would first have to evaluate the content of specific sites before giving students the URL. An easier method

would be to have students access certain material directly from the teacher’s web quest. However, in this case, the teacher is essentially doing the same thing as compiling materials.

Access to technology and the internet are two of the biggest challenges most teachers face in implementing web quests. Even in countries where there is extensive use of technology, there are still many institutions in which access is very limited. This may result in computer time becoming a valuable commodity and could make it difficult to justify its use on what is essentially a self-access activity. If students are expected to do the web quests outside of class time, then it is quite likely that only a small percentage of the class will do so if there is a low level of internet connectivity in the community. Furthermore, even if a teacher has scheduled computer time, it may be that the computer lab is being used for examinations or other activities that would prevent the teachers from completing the web quest.

The ability of teachers and students to create and complete Web Quests can often be affected by the level of access to computers and the internet. As the task of Web Quests is to find information from the web, therefore students might not gain the most out of the exercise if the connection to the internet is dial-up and even then quite slow, as the frustration of the students may lead to early abandonment of the task. The speed of the connection can also impede teachers from setting the task in the first place, as it is likely that class time will be lost from slow internet connection, this makes teachers reluctant to set the task. If the level of internet access is sufficient, students and teachers can then be confined by the number of computers that can be used to access the internet. If there are not enough computers to facilitate the entire class, teachers might be deterred from setting the task, due to the fact that the computers may be needed for other subjects or class time is not frequent enough to warrant the task being undertaken. This type of restriction can often mean that only one or two students can access the internet to do the task which is not ideal, as Web Quests are designed to be a task that is worked on in small groups. Difficulty of access can also mean that students must do the task at home. While a high percentage of households have an internet connection, the task is still being affected because internet restrictions mean that the task is no longer something being completed at school, and the interactivity and guidance from the teacher is lost. This can also lead to scenarios where a student does not have internet access at home, and is subsequently unable to complete the task. The final and perhaps most important factor is the level of technical skills that students have when using a computer. A requirement to Google something may be a simple task to many, but can be an arduous adventure involving many confusing steps to some students, and the quest can be lost when different students encounter different problems.

Dodge adds that web quests should be enjoyable. This is true as it encourages students to engage in a task that has been self-determined by the teacher, and hopefully, it will lead to students creating their own web quests as a learning task. The use of hyperlinks and multimedia is good in making the task fun and enjoyable. Hyperlinks may be created into other websites and more information for the task at hand. Here, the teacher must be wary of the openness of the internet and the links used. This may be achieved by the teacher giving students a demonstration of how to create a favorite

containing a hyperlink to the favorite back on the web quest task.

Discovery's 'Guidelines for Web Quest Development' and Levin's 'Seven Steps of the Web Quest' provide general induction about creating web quests. According to March (2000), the quality of the task can be greatly improved by ensuring authenticity, a higher order thinking function, and a sense of accomplishment in students. Levine and Hu (2002) also add that the teacher should clearly outline the task, where students know where to start and how to finish. Frequent feedback from students will allow the teacher to know whether or not they are on track with the task and to make sure the students are not lost and wandering through information on the internet (Levin, 2003). Feedback can be achieved by building in checkpoints where students pose questions to each other, to the teacher, or to themselves about whether or not they are doing the right thing. Instruction can also include benchmarks in the task, where students submit partial task work and teacher feedback is given before they proceed with the task. Any of these forms of communication can ensure that the task is being done appropriately and the communication is moving in a positive direction among the group.

WebQuest activities should be assessed based on the quality of work rather than the completion of the task. Rubrics are an assessment tool used to measure standards and provide a form of feedback. A notable value of rubrics is that they can be used for formative evaluation and allow the student to see where their work is in relation to the standards and make adjustments accordingly. This tool is ideal for the assessment of a WebQuest task.

WebQuests have the potential to provide students with learning experiences that involve higher-level thinking, problem-solving, and often creativity. As a result, understanding and measuring the learning from these experiences requires an approach that is different from the traditional objective test. The nature of WebQuests is such that the process often mirrors the experience of real-life learning and problem-solving, and the product is a result of the application of knowledge in a dynamic environment.

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