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Abstract

This section looks at useful on-line resources for foreign language teachers and learners. Your contribution may include a review of a particular website used in class or any other link that you consider useful for FL tutors' professional development. If you would like to contribute to the Web@glance section, please submit your review to Dr. *Teadora Pérez* at teadora@ula.ve.

What is a WebQuest?

Resumen

El propósito de esta sección consiste en revisar recursos en línea destinados a la enseñanza/aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras. Su contribución puede incluir una revisión de materiales basados en la Web utilizados por docentes en su aula de clase u otro enlace o página Web que pueda contribuir con el

desarrollo profesional de los docentes de lenguas extranjeras. Si desea contribuir con esta sesión por favor envíe su contribución al siguiente e-mail: teadora@ula.ve.

In this volume, Nicky Hockly BA looks at WebQuest Repository available at: <http://www.theconsultants-e.com/webquests/>

Bernie Dodge of San Diego State University was one of the first people to attempt to define and structure this kind of learning activity. According to him, a WebQuest is “*an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet...*”

He identifies two types of WebQuest:

- * Short Term WebQuests - The instructional goal of a short term WebQuest is knowledge acquisition and integration. At the end of a short term WebQuest, a learner will have grappled with a significant amount of new information and made sense of it.
- * Longer Term WebQuests - The instructional goal of a longer term WebQuest is extending and refining knowledge. After completing a longer term WebQuest, a learner would have analyzed a body of knowledge deeply, transformed it in some way, and demonstrated an understanding of the material by creating something that others can respond to, on-line or off-.

Essentially, then, we might consider WebQuests to be mini-projects in which a large percentage of the input and material is supplied by the Internet. WebQuests can be teacher-made or learner-made, depending on the learning activity the teacher decides on.

Why use Webquests?

There are many compelling reasons for using WebQuests in the classroom, including:

- 1) They are an easy way for teachers to begin to incorporate the Internet into the language classroom, on both a short-term and long-term basis - no specialist

technical knowledge is needed either to produce or use them.

- 2) More often than not, they are group activities and as a result tend to lend themselves to communication and the sharing of knowledge - two principal goals of language teaching itself. The use of WebQuests encourages cooperative learning, and therefore stimulates conversation.
- 3) They can be used simply as a linguistic tool, but can also be interdisciplinary, allowing for cross-over into other departments and subject areas (where applicable). This can often give them a more ‘real-world’ look and feel and provide greater motivation for the learner.
- 4) They encourage critical (or higher level) thinking skills, including: comparing, classifying, inducing, deducing, analyzing errors, constructing support, abstraction, analyzing perspectives, etc. Learners are not able to simply regurgitate information they find, but are guided towards a transformation of that information in order to achieve a given task.
- 5) They are both motivating and authentic tasks (if well-designed) 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, coupled with real-life material and input, can be a greater motivator than outdated coursebooks and other such teaching materials.

Structure of a WebQuest

WebQuests have now been around long enough for them to have a clearly-

defined structure (see overleaf). However, this structure - whilst being unofficially recognised as the definitive schema for these activities - should only really be taken as a basic guideline and you should design your WebQuests to suit the needs and learning styles of your group.

There are usually four main sections to a WebQuest:

1) Introduction

This stage is normally used to introduce the overall theme of the WebQuest. 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.

2) Task

The Task section of the WebQuest explains clearly and precisely what the learners will have to do as they work their way through the WebQuest. The task should obviously be highly motivating and intrinsically interesting for the learners, and should be firmly anchored in a real-life situation. This often involves the learners in a certain amount of role-play within a given scenario (e.g., you are the school social organiser and have to organise a trip for your class to an English-speaking country...)

3) Process

The Process stage of a WebQuest 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 WebQuest - 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 WebQuest, the Process stage of the WebQuest may introduce (or recycle) lexical areas or grammatical points which are essential to the Task. The Process stage of the WebQuest 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 (see below).

4) 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, and good WebQuests will give guidance to the teacher for this particular part of the process.

Examples

The Consultants-E Webquest repository offers examples on how EFL tutors have integrated this e-tool into their language classrooms. These Webquests are provided in *PDF format* and EFL tutors can use them in their class, provided they get the author's permission.

One of the examples provided is the Webquest called *the perfect place to live competition* designed by *Sheila Hutton*. This WebQuest

was written for a group of mixed nationality students, in the 18 – 23 age group, just starting out on an English foundation/pre-university course at a tertiary college. This webquest is available in PDF format at: <http://www.theconsultants-e.com/webquests/SheilaPerfectPlaceWQ.pdf>

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