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WEBQUEST IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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There is no denying nowadays that the Internet and computer technologies have penetrated all spheres of our lives. They are increasingly used in the educational process with the aim to facilitate teaching and to enhance learning. In this context the Internet is recognized as a huge source of information which is easily accessible and quite productive in the classroom. Benefits of Internet use in English teaching not once were described by scholars. The most important are the increased motivation and participation by students [1]; more opportunities to interact with the target language and content area because students spend more time on task [2];

greater integration of reading and writing skills and opportunities to practice them in meaningful contexts; the possibility to implement a pedagogy based on problem solving and critical thinking [3]; more self-paced autonomous learning that is learner-controlled rather than teacher-controlled [4]. Besides the Internet provides authentic material which makes language lessons closer to "real world" experiences.

A webquest is a good example showing the effectiveness of using the Internet at language classes. There are several factors that make a webquest different from any other Internet-based activity. First of all, it is a classroom-based and group activity. It is aimed not to gather information (it is done by a teacher who preselects the sources) but to apply it creatively thus developing higher-order thinking such as analysis or criticism.

The term 'webquest' was suggested by the inventor of this activity, Bernie Dodge, who described it as "'an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet" [5].

Later Philip Benz defined a webquest as a "constructive approach to learning in which …students not only collate and organize information they have found on the web, but orient their activities towards a specific goal they have been given…" [6]

A co-creator of this activity, T. March, expanded the definition of a webquest as "a scaffold learning structure that uses links to essential resources on the World Wide Web and an authentic task to motivate students' investigation of a central, open-ended question, development of individual expertise and participation in a final group process that attempts to transform newly acquired information into a more sophisticated understanding" [7].

Nowadays, educators understand a webquest as a mini-project in which a large percentage of the input and material is supplied by the Internet which can be teacher-made or learner-made depending on the learning activity the teacher decides on. A webquest is usually organized for students who work in small groups by following the steps in the webquest model to tackle the problems, propose hypotheses, search for information with the web links provided by the teacher, analyse and synthesize the information using guided questions, and present solutions to the problems. Students are often given certain roles in the group. By working on the topics in the area in which they assume a role, students collectively contribute to the understanding of the issues.

Bernie Dodge differentiated between short-term webquests, which extend through one to three class periods, and long-term webquests, which extend between one week and one month. He also identified six principle features that a well-designed webquest should have: an introduction, a task, information sources, a description of the process, guidance on how the information should be organized, and a conclusion [5].

Typical webquests nowadays have the following components:

1) the introduction which is used to introduce the topic of the webquest. It contains background information 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) a set of tasks that are feasible and interesting. Tasks of a webquest explain in detail what students should do and what their end product should be. Students first should learn some basic background information about the issue. Then, working in small groups, they become "experts" on some aspect of the problem by analyzing the web sites given to them by the teacher. Finally, they complete a real world activity by producing an output,

e.g. a written report, an oral presentation, etc. The instructions, therefore, need to identify clearly the steps the students should go through in order to accomplish the final task and should provide scaffolding for organizing the information gathered during the activity. The task should be motivating for the learners and close to a real-life situation. Sometimes students are involved into a role-play (e.g. you are a lawyer of a law firm and have to provide legal assistance to a client on the following issue...);

3) a set of information sources needed to complete the task. Teachers usually pre-select a few websites which provide background information for all learners, as well as specific websites for each student's role;

4) a description of the process the learners should follow to complete the task. At language classes this step may include the work with new or topical vocabulary, grammar points or other essential to the task material. This step has one or several 'products' which the learners are expected to present at the end;

5) evaluation, usually in the form of a rubric that sets the assessment criteria for the students. This stage involves the students in self-evaluation and 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;

6) a conclusion that closes the quest and encourages the learners to reflect on the process.

Although there are a lot of ready-made webquests, teachers devising new ones that should correspond to the educational needs, students'interests and abilities have to consider several factors: the age, level and linguistic ability of the students; the vocabulary which will be needed to complete the task; the teaching context into which the webquest is to fit; the strategies to be practiced. No specialist technical knowledge is needed to produce

webquests. Webquests are simple webpages, and they can be built with any software that allows you to create websites. There are several websites that are specifically geared towards creating webquests. *Questgarden, Zunal,* and *Teacherweb* all allow teachers to create accounts, and these websites walk them through the process of creating a webquest. These websites make the creation process very simple and straightforward.

Like any other learning activity webquests have both advantages and disadvantages. Among the benefits of webquests scholars mention aiding to systematize Internet inquiry-based learning (Godwin-Jones, 2004), increasing learners' motivation and involvement in class (Halat, 2008), assisting learners to organize and employ the knowledge gained (MacGregor & Lou, 2005), conferring efficient scaffolding in cooperative group learning, and encouraging learner autonomy (Lara & Reparaz, 2007). Ikpeze and Boyd (2007) argue that webquests help bridge the gap between content literacy and technological literacy. Learners are not just learning to deal with technology, but were using the technology to enhance their learning [8].

Moreover, webquests are very productive in language learning, as they allow students to receive the information in aural and written form, encourage reading information on web pages or participating in group discussion in the target language. Students can test newly integrated language knowledge and if there is misunderstanding, they can discuss meaning and try to produce the more intelligible result. This activity can help to develop fluency, accuracy, and complexity of the language. It encourages social interaction and collaboration so students have opportunities for communication in the target language.

The drawbacks in the webquest use may include unwillingness of students to work in groups as they prefer to work on their own on the

webquest task. Besides some of the students accustomed to more traditional lessons focusing on reading textbooks, working with vocabulary and grammar find this activity time-consuming and boring due to the use of the instruction method.

Nevertheless, the experience shows that a carefully organized webquest not only stimulates interactions and provides motivation but considerably changes educational atmosphere at lessons.

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РУССКИЙ ЯЗЫК КАК ВАЖНЕЙШАЯ СОСТАВЛЯЮЩАЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ ИЗ БЛИЖНЕГО ЗАРУБЕЖЬЯ

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В последние годы в вузах Украины, в частности в ХНМУ, наметилась тенденция к уменьшению количества иностранных студентов из дальнего зарубежья, стремящихся получить высшее образование на русском языке, в то время как увеличился поток абитуриентов из стран СНГ. Значительное место среди них занимают граждане Азербайджана, Таджикистана, Туркменистана и Узбекистана.

Достаточно длительное время наблюдались обратные процессы. После распада Союза рост национального самосознания и желание изолироваться от общего коммуникативного пространства на начальном этапе становления независимости бывших республик Союза ознаменовались негативным отношением к русскому языку вплоть до отказа от его изучения или, в лучшем случае, резкого сокращения количества часов на его преподавание в национальных школах.

Важная роль русского языка в качестве языка межнационального общения во всех областях межкультурного, экономического и

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