

ELT



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Exploring Online Reading: The Case of a WebQuest Lesson.

by Maria Karageorgou

Education in the 21st century has undergone remarkable changes. Emergency remote teaching due to COVID-19 restrictions imposed globally has created new challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning. Henceforth, learner autonomy in the new technology enhanced learning environment comes to the forefront as a broad target of education. The use of technology in class amplifies 21st century skills which are essential in a global education context and lead to the evolution of ICT skills and cognitive skills such as transforming learning from a plethora of resources available online. With this in mind this article will present how to implement an online reading lesson using a WebQuest. Reading as a receptive skill can be challenging over other skills. In many cases, readers are not necessarily engaging with digital texts effectively or efficiently. A WebQuest is one effective strategy to promote and train learners to exploratory learning.

“A WebQuest is a lesson scenario which revolves around a central investigatory activity that focuses on solving a problem for which digital information and data processing is necessary.”

The term ‘WebQuest’ was introduced by Dodge (1997) to describe structured learning activities that explore digital and non-digital sources, such as websites, digital libraries, databases, magazines, newspapers, etc. A WebQuest is a lesson scenario which revolves around a central investigatory activity that focuses on solving a problem for which digital information and data processing is necessary. WebQuest fosters the development of high order thinking skills, such as analysing, synthesizing and evaluating information but also allows students to apply the information and the knowledge they have acquired in everyday life situations.

The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the WebQuest is based on Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-constructivist theory. The learner in this procedure assumes an active role and creates knowledge by integrating information and by discovering something rather than ‘learning about it’. According to Godwin-Jones (2004:9) “WebQuests tend to be student-oriented and collaborative, with students engaged in constructivist activities resulting in shared learning experiences and new knowledge based on inquiry-oriented language use and Web research skills”.

The WebQuest procedure apart from reading online texts looking for specific information; fosters the employment of other sub skills such as writing, speaking and listening. Tasks are meaning oriented, with a real-life purpose, in the WebQuest described in this article learners are given a budget to organize their trip, and a communicative goal which offers the sense of accomplishment to learners who assume roles in order to follow through the demands of tasks. There is a correlation between task-based learning and WebQuest because

learners need to complete certain steps in order to reach an outcome. This ‘learning-by-doing’ environment constitutes a student centered and self-directed learning environment. In this assignment’s WebQuest the teacher follows the project-based approached as a branch of a learner-determined lesson to promote collaboration culminating the production of a PowerPoint presentation in this technology-enhanced lesson.

Description of the stages of the WebQuest lesson

The following WebQuest is designed for B2 level students. Learners are interested in using technologies in all facets of their everyday life. In an oral discussion with this focus group the teacher gets information about the interests of the learners. Furthermore, a school trip for the students at school is organised annually; so it is a good chance to offer them a WebQuest; a topic to look information for- that is related to real life situations and will keep them interested. Topics like travelling, studying abroad, scholarships and careers are their fields of interest and they are partially intrigued by a unit of this textbook about fascinating places around the world. Therefore, learners have acquired topic vocabulary about travelling.

This WebQuest lesson is implemented across four hours. The purpose of this quest is for students to collect over two different tourist destinations and finally organize and present to class the suggested plan for the annual school trip. Students need to vote after the presentations. Voting is necessary so that each and every student pays attention to their classmates’ presentations and in order to select the best organized program for their school trip. The WebQuest which can be designed on the Zunal software online consists of six critical attributes as shown in the figure.

Six Critical Attributes



WebQuest Attributes

Pic by Author

At the introduction the teacher addresses the students and sets the scene for the following stages. At this first step the teacher welcomes the students and announces the main goals of the WebQuest.

The role of the teacher during the WebQuest lesson is a facilitator and observer of students' performance. At the task stage, the main purpose is to set what is expected from them by the end of the course. Then in the process stage, resources and specific tasks are given by the teacher so as to guide the whole procedure.

During the pre-reading phase students are provided with guidelines and they are reminded of the main purpose of their 'quest'. In this WebQuest during the first task students are requested to create groups; each group is to look for information about a different trip destination and they are assigned roles within their team. They are given guidelines on how to conduct the group work and then they should start by browsing the hyperlinks given in order to collect the information they need in order to organize their trip. The hyperlinks attached on the WebQuest are provided by the teacher who collects them from various official internet sites. Some of the criteria for choosing them pertain to:

- ✓ User is able to quickly determine the basic content of the site
- ✓ The author of the material is clearly identified
- ✓ Content is updated frequently
- ✓ Links to other sites are current and working properly
- ✓ The content achieves the intended purpose effectively
- ✓ The content is well organized and easy to understand
- ✓ The information is accurate based on user's previous knowledge of the subject
- ✓ There are links to other sites that are related the needs and purposes of the lesson

Then in the second task, which is part of the while reading stage, the questions given aim at helping them reflect and finalize details that will be needed for the program of the trip.

In the third task, students could watch a video with English subtitles from the Expedia website about travel guides to different countries which provides an overview of the country they investigate and then in groups they take a Kahoot quiz which is attached as a hyperlink in order to consolidate the information. For example, the quiz could contain questions on details and information worth to be mentioned in the presentation afterwards so it is a way to focus students' attention.

Finally, at the post-reading phase, they are given guidelines on how to make a PowerPoint presentation with Google slides in order to present the program they have organized for their excursion so as to vote for their final destination.

Rationale of the WebQuest material and procedure

The choice of texts for this WebQuest was based on the criteria aligned by McLachlan (2002). The texts pertained to tourist destinations, monuments, restaurants, hotels and airline websites. Most of the resources provided are taken from official tourism sites which are updated, the content is well organized and relevant to the purpose of the 'quest'. It is essential to train learners on a criteria checklist involving the date, domain, publisher, author and information which is considered important not only in the selection of websites but also in order to evolve autonomous research skills. Another pivotal criterion is related to choosing websites which are highly multimodal enhanced with 'semiotic resources' such as visuals and sounds. Based on the flow model initially mentioned by Csikszentmihalyi, the importance of keeping our learners motivated and engaged in an activity and their attention at maximum is also called 'optimal experience' and in the selection of these online reading pages the level of language of them was also considered. The language level is a criterion also implied by Krashen's i+1 theory (Krashen, 1982) which suggests that the text should be a level more difficult from the one the learners are so as to keep them involved cognitively.

The choice of tasks is linked to the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills such as reading skills, research skills and higher order thinking. Subskills like, note-taking, summarizing and paraphrasing, skimming and scanning reading strategies and synthesizing information were the main objectives. Online reading is non-linear in the sense that readers rarely have just one text in front of them. Given that students need to browse links and collect information. A web page often presents multiple texts, pictures, videos and advertisements and readers tend to click on those links, moving rapidly from one site to another and occasionally returning to the original page.

In the first task, where learners need to browse the websites, it is important to remember the rubrics in order to keep in mind the purpose and remain concentrated on what they need to know. In addition, metacognitive skills such as evaluating the information and especially scanning specific information and developing reading strategies are also required (Grabe and Stoller, 2011).

During the second task, the comprehension questions address higher order skills that require synthesizing information from various resources and as well note taking skills that help students get organized.

In the third task, learners are required to watch a video and then take an online quiz to consolidate knowledge. The reason that this task involves a video is for the learners to raise intercultural awareness and reflect on what they have read and get prepared for the next task.

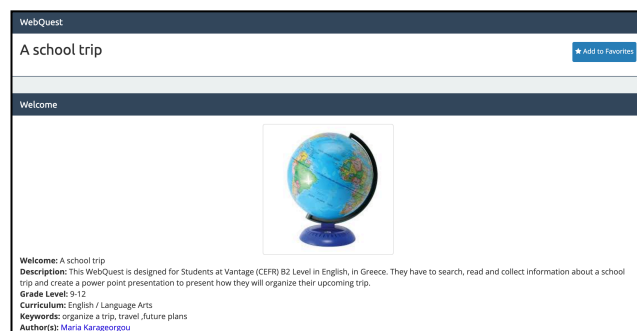
The fourth task, which is the post reading phase of the WebQuest, pertains to their PowerPoint presentation which is considered “a good activity to bridge the cognitive processes associated with personal learning and those associated with communicating with an audience” (Clyde and Delohery, 2005:168). Their presentation can be implemented on Google slides as well which lets students easily collaborate and share a slide deck. The last task in the WebQuest is about evaluation.

The criteria for evaluation are determined mainly by the teacher and then by the demands and the purpose of the assigned ‘quest’. Learners complete a group self-assessment checklist and they will be assessed on a variety of criteria by the teacher as well. Peer involvement in assessment aims to help students “better assess themselves” so it beneficial to be included as well.

The criteria focus on note taking, skimming and scanning websites, compare and contrast, group work, positive attitude, focus on task, time management, research skills and finally organizing the excursion plan of the ‘quest’ which were needed in order to complete this WebQuest. Assessment is multifaceted and continuous. This procedure promotes the positive ‘washback effect’ optimizing learners’ performance and language acquisition.

By following the link or scanning the QR code, you can find an example of the WebQuest described in this article.

<http://zunal.com/webquest.php?w=455723>



Screenshot of WebQuest lesson

Pic by ELT Ireland

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