The Benefit of Using Web Quest in Teaching English as a Second language

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Abstract:

Background*:The course suggested below is designed for a private language institute in Greece and it will, approximately, take 5 teaching hours to be completed. The institute is well equipped, has a modern computer lab with internet access and both the teachers and students are competent users of the internet and computer literate. Also the headmasters of the institute are open minded and willing to give students a variety of tools to assist them in their learning. The principal aim of the institute, is to produce competent, autonomous learners, that actively participate in their own development. Learners, therefore, are encouraged to experiment with ideas, try out different solutions to problems ,and be active learners and users of language. Moreover, the politics of the school also support that students should be actively involved with new technologies and the WWW, so as to develop their critical thinking skills, and thus assist them in succeeding in their exams and also, help learners improve their understanding of the complexities of modern life, enable them to grapple with new ethical and practical issues and thus become responsible and successful members in the society.*

Materials and Methods*: The age of the learners in the class, ranges from 16- 18 years old ,their language level is advanced and they are preparing for the CPE language examination. The CPE examination involves learners in writing opinion and critical essays , either on universal themes like smoking or pollution or on events that had universal effect or impact. Moreover their reading skills (skimming, scanning) will be tested, as well as their ability to identify the author's opinion in reading texts that appear neutral.*
Additionally, in the speaking section of the exam, students will be asked to express opinions, to think critically and examine an issue from various perspectives, challenge and report any possible assumptions that underlie the issue and to explore its possible alternatives.
Taking into consideration these factors, the politics of the school and student needs and aims, I believe that, suggesting an internet based course, as the one we are going to present, meets the demands of both the students and the institute, so it is likely to be approved by the headmasters and be implemented.

Results*: This paper will demonstrate, the pedagogical value of the internet and has put forward a case for using the internet in class by showing the positive and elevating influence, it may have on language teaching and learning. Our web based course, succeeds in developing all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) with out making artificial distinctions between them and thus making language learning appear set of vague skills, that students must master. In terms of literacy acquisition, this course encourages students to not only learn to read and write, but also to read and write to learn new concepts and better understand phenomena to which they have already been exposed or will be exposed in the future. Finally, students are allowed to practice their critical thinking skills in a course that encourages them to generate new ideas, problem-solve through reasoning, focus on different aspects of form in the target language and make the best decisions possible in a given situation. All these merits, however, are very hard, even impossible, to be achieved in traditional course book based class*
Conclusion:*We believe that the advantages of using the internet in classroom outweigh the disadvantages and an attempt to implement it in classroom practices should be made*
Key Word*: Internet, Web Quests, English as a second language.*

I. Introduction

The WWW is a 'revolutionary medium' (Warschauer 2000). Via the use of e-mail or network communities, the internet can assist students to enter into the authentic kinds of discourse situations and discourse communities, that they will later encounter outside the classroom, a possibility that is indispensable since, as Hymes (1971) argues, learning the social appropriateness of a language is vital in language learning.

Moreover, the internet gives learners the opportunity to access and organize new information, since it offers a vast variety of informational resources, and allows students the possibility to search through millions of files throughout the world within minutes so as to locate and access authentic information and materials. This potential of the internet will be further explored in this paper, since as widely advocated, using authentic web pages in language teaching has several advantages for L2 language acquisition.

This paper, begins by attempting to identify the advantages of using authentic web pages in L2 classroom, then an examination of the positive effects Web Quests may have on the learning process follows. On the basis of these descriptions, we will then design and suggest a course, discuss its aims and objectives and finally conclude this paper, by investigating any possible implications, the course is likely to encounter in its implementation.

II. Material And Methods
Use Of authentic Web pages.

Employing authentic web pages in a second language classroom can be motivating and not unduly daunting to learners since asKienbaum, Russel and Welty (1986 cited in Chappelle) found, from an attitude survey, elementary and advanced level foreign language learners express a high degree of interest in authentic, current event, materials. Furthermore, as Guariento (2000) account makes plain, students are more motivated when studying with lessons based on the latest news and current events, than when using the relatively dated materials of coursebooks.

Moreover, as Dudeney (2000) illustrates students' interest and genuine response increases, when they are studying with lessons on events that are unfolding around them (even when their knowledge of the information item presented is sparse) because asDudeney (2000) points out, there is an additional element of "prestige value" in the lessons, as students feel they are learning more than just English. Accompanying this argument Eastment (1999) also notes that authentic web sites give students the sense that they are learning the 'real' language ; that they are in touch with a living entity , the target language as it is used by the community that speaks it, and this is considered to be one way of maintaining or increasing students motivation for learning the target language.

In a similar vein , we can argue that using real world sites in classroom is often more interesting than using a sterilized coursebook not only because they are more authentic and context rich, but because they can bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and students' capacity to participate in real world events (Wilkins 1976, cited in Beatty 2003). Otherwise, learning is less likely to engage intrinsic motivational processes, since as .... notes, when learners are unable to make meaningful connection between what is learnt and what is experienced in life outside, their intrinsic motivation dwindles

Moreover, Beatty (2003) argues that, we need to expose learners to authentic texts so that they may have the immediate and direct contact which reflects genuine communication in the target language. In this respect, and since every piece of writing brings with it the culture of the country from which it originated, students through the use of the authentic on line materials are also given the opportunity to study cultural contents, current events, trends and new developments in various areas from various viewpoints, thus their cultural awareness is cultivated.

A further advantage of the use of authentic web sites in classroom is that, as Levy (1997) emphasizes, students may be empowered by the self directed work, with the international and real world resources found on the WWW, and become more confident and autonomous learners.

Therefore, as Chapelle (2001) stresses, teachers should endorse to promote such an attitude towards learning, that encourages the possibility of students 'learning to learn', solve problems on their own and hence, assist students to match, on the one hand, the challenge of individual difference and on the other hand, the complexities of the modern world, for which school is an attempt at preparation.

Web Quests.

A way to instill such attitudes and create autonomous, life long learners that will be both literate and fluent in the target language is, as Dodge (2000) proposed, to engage learners in meaningful, motivated activities using the target language.

In a similar vein, recent trends in language teaching, as summarized by Eastment (1999), challenge the traditional/ structural way of teaching, that is based on the mere presentation of fundamental ideas and transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student. They put forward the argument that, in order for effective learning to take place, it is crucial for the teacher to assist students become autonomous, life long learners. A way to establish such an attitude, as Rakes (1996) notes, is by leading students in seeing themselves in the discovery mode in order to form the basic concepts that will enable them to understand the subject field as it currently is, and to understand some of the attitudes and conventions of the language, that are determinant for internalizing the forms of the new language at a high level.

Moreover , as Gruender (1996)notes, students must also have a sense of excitement about the discovery of the regularities, of previously unrecognized relations and similarities between ideas and values incorporated in the language examined.

Influenced by these theories, educators have sought to establish this attitude - students as 'discoverers'- in the L2 class , by the implementation of Web quests in language teaching.

A Web quest, as defined by Dodge(1995) , is an "instructional strategy" , using carefully selected internet sites and purposefully designed questions and activities to move learners to a fuller understanding of the topic/ problem at hand. Their mission is to engage students in tasks, that would ultimately cause them to learn while attempting to achieve a preset goal.

The concept of the webquest, as an effective instructional/learning strategy, also draws its strength from several decades of cognitive science research. In particular, Caine (1994) argued in favor of the natural acquisition of knowledge saying that knowledge is what results when 'information felt' meaning and 'deep meaning' come together.

Drawing from this theory, we can claim that a further advantage for the implementation of Web quests, lies in their structure. A Web quest's structure, models the cognitive and physical process the learner must go through to perceive and produce the new language. Thus, it is clear that Web quests, by modeling an implicit process through which new language and linguistic rules can be acquired, can assist learners to naturally internalize and automatically reproduce the process of learning. This argument is also endorsed by March (1998), who notes that , Web quests present information at a pace that matches a natural acquisition order and as March(1998) further reports, they also allow learners to have their own workplace where they can take risks and experiment in ways that are not psychologically threatening in a classroom environment. This slowing down of the process can be extremely beneficial for language learners especially, shy ones that are afraid of losing face in class and tend not to participate in class discussions.

Another key issue that Web quests address, is learners' mindful engagement with instructional materials. While engaged in the Web quest students are active contributors, to their language learning, than passive recipients of knowledge, since they   are cognitively involved in seeking answers, making generalizations and testing hypotheses that they have generated. In this way , knowledge is constructed by the learner in the sense that he has to relate new elements of knowledge to already existing cognitive structures (Grueder 1996). The creation of such a constructivist environment according to Dodge encourages , action knowledge, critical reflection on new information and leads learners to exert a conscious effort for learning and hence, as many researchers argue (Pennington 1996, Warschauer& Kern 2000) ,promotes better learning. Since as March (1998) supports learners learn better when they are presented with a problem of genuine interest and have to develop knowledge and understanding and analyze it via forming and refining concepts using the resources available.

In addition, as Dodge (2000) observes , this method (Web quests) is highly motivating, since learners have the sense that they are doing something real and useful, as well as extremely beneficial. This inevitably leads students to put to more effort, greater concentration and a real interest in task achievement and become more independent and confident language learners.

Previous research/ Suggested course.

Having discussed the benefits of web quests and authentic web pages in language learning, we will, in this part of the paper, suggest a course that uses the internet, and specifically Web quests, as a delivery medium, and on line newspapers, to facilitate and promote in depth, active learning.

 Newspaper articles have long been a staple item, in both reading and conversation classes because they are generally short, predictable in style, timely in content, and easy to find and use. One can hardly deny the usefulness of reading English newspapers in the process of learning. The only, and the most crucial, problem with them is the price. Therefore, electronic newspapers are a great chance for educators and learners, since they are easily accessible and virtually free. The issue of the use of on line newspapers has been taken up by many researches.

Seedwood, in his 1994 article ' Using Newspapers on CD ROMs' takes up the issue of using newspapers in class, and gives some ideas for using such electronic papers for reading, preparing topics, discussing in class, writing tasks (reconstructing a text from a series of prompts), comprehension and vocabulary exercises.

Moreover ,the issue of using on line newspapers is also explored in some detail by Brown in his article '"Internet Treasure Hunts - A Treasure of an Activity for Students Learning English." . Brown supports that using on line papers in classroom builds on students' reading skills, as well as it provides them with a variety of choice and enriches their cultural awareness.

However, the traditional method of having students read silently, answer comprehension questions, and then discuss an article can become boring to both students and teachers.

At this point we would like to present an alternative way, to this traditional approach, of using on line newspapers.

Our course exploits the potential of using newspapers from around the world and engages students in a process of taking information from different sources, re-evaluating and restructuring that information. Going through this process will develop students' reading, speaking and writing skills, but more importantly it will develop their critical thinking skills, and that in my opinion is far more beneficial for students in today's world, than having them memorize a predetermined context.

Description of the Course/ Rationale.
Context.

The course suggested below is designed for a private language institute in Greece and it will, approximately, take 5 teaching hours to be completed. The institute is well equipped, has a modern computer lab with internet access and both the teachers and students are competent users of the internet and computer literate. Also the headmasters of the institute are open minded and willing to give students a variety of tools to assist them in their learning.

The principal aim of the institute, is to produce competent, autonomous learners, that actively participate in their own development. Learners, therefore, are encouraged to experiment with ideas, try out different solutions to problems ,and be active learners and users of language. Moreover, the politics of the school also support that students should be actively involved with new technologies and the WWW, so as to develop their critical thinking skills, and thus assist them in succeeding in their exams and also, help learners improve their understanding of the complexities of modern life, enable them to grapple with new ethical and practical issues and thus become responsible and successful members in the society.

The age of the learners in the class, ranges from 16- 18 years old ,their language level is advanced and they are preparing for the CPE language examination. The CPE examination involves learners in writing opinion and critical essays , either on universal themes like smoking or pollution or on events that had universal effect or impact. Moreover their reading skills (skimming, scanning) will be tested, as well as their ability to identify the author's opinion in reading texts that appear neutral.

Additionally, in the speaking section of the exam, students will be asked to express opinions, to think critically and examine an issue from various perspectives, challenge and report any possible assumptions that underlie the issue and to explore its possible alternatives.

Taking into consideration these factors, the politics of the school and student needs and aims, I believe that, suggesting an internet based course, as the one we are going to present, meets the demands of both the students and the institute, so it is likely to be approved by the headmasters and be implemented.

Rationale.

The overall aim of the course is to encourage students to develop a critical awareness of the process of writing. In other words, to assist learners develop not only operational and descriptive knowledge of the linguistic practices of their world, but also a critical awareness of how these practices are shaped by, and shape, social relationships and relationships of power. We, moreover, aim to raise students' consciousness about issues of power and status in relation to writing; learners, as Clark(1997) notes, should not be acculturated unquestionably into ideologies that support particular social orders. Rather they should be aware of the writing practices, of the beliefs and ideologies embedded in certain writing practices, discourses and genres.

Also this course aims at demystifying the writing process and practices, and thus help students understand what goes on cognitively and emotionally when writers write. Moreover this course involves students in realistic reading, speaking and writing tasks that have advanced pedagogical purposes, beyond that of merely practicing accuracy.

In the Introduction stage the teacher introduces the overall theme of the webquest. He provides background information on this major world event (September 11th terrorist attack) and introduces any key vocabulary and concepts that learners will need to understand in order to complete the subsequent tasks.

The choice of the task, in my opinion, is likely to engage students interest and willingness to participate and respond since, it is an event of genuine interest, on which they have sufficient background information (it was prevalent in the Greek mass media for quite a while). It is an authentic event that has a broad appeal and moreover, students at this age tend to have a natural inclination to talk about news.

In this stage, the teacher also activates students schemata and background knowledge by having them brainstorm around the theme and express any initial opinions and feelings they have on the issue. The teacher also creates a meaningful context for students to communicate by triggering their curiosity to learn more and thus increases their motivation.

After the introduction the students move to   the Task section of the webquest. This part   explains what the learners will have to do as they work their way through the webquest. The task is highly motivating and intrinsically interesting for the learners, since it is firmly anchored in a real-life event. Furthermore at this stage students are also provided with an audience and a purpose for writing in a second language.

Developing a sense of an audience, as Byrne (1989) points out, makes students more independent and confident to write since they feel that they use the language to fulfill a real life purpose . They   are also presented with a original, motivating ' real ' task that provides students with an opportunity to express their opinion and achieve a broader goal . As a result, asDeci& Ryan (2000) report, this task, that students perceive as being tied to larger, more important goal, is likely to engender high motivation and serious engagement. Furthermore, they report that students pay closer attention to their language use during such motivating real life tasks, and that extra effort, results in more polished work and thus greater learning.

Moreover, students feel as active agents, purposefully seeking and constructing knowledge within a meaningful context. This can result, as goal theories suggest, in raising students intrinsic motivation, capturing their attention and promote in depth learning

The Process stage of the web Quest, that follows guides learners through a set of activities and research tasks, using a set of predefined resources. The process is clear and well structured so that students will easily and accurately understand what they are expected to do and they will not waste any time searching for the resources needed.

 Firstly, students are divided into groups and are given a newspaper article to analyze. Then in groups they decide who will be in charge of filling in, which table (see segments). In this way a democratic, open, collaborative, critical but not threatening environment is established. The teacher, moreover, has provided students with tables that can help them break down the article into manageable parts and thus recognize any instances of bias easier.(for further explanation of the segments see appendix 1)

Then, students have to work independently, at their own pace in order to fill the table assigned to them and draft some first notes on any instances of bias or implied meaning they noticed. Assigning students to work independently before they engage to group work has several advantages. First as a study in Bulgarian schools points out, individual work can raise students level of commitment to the task. In addition, this phase, engages students in active involvement with the texts, as well as, allows them to be self directed and contribute at their own time and pace. This can be beneficial in building an effective classroom environment that promotes participation, since as Kroonenberg (1995 cited in Penninghton) reports shy, introverted students tend to become more willing to join in subsequent oral discussions on the topic when they have the time to work and think in advance.

Afterwards, students will have to discuss in groups their findings and form a first draft of their report on how culture and social context can influence the interpretation of an event. This activity draws its strength from the process writing theory. According to this theory, when students collaborate, draft and revise their papers in groups, the quality of expression of their ideas increases, since their work is also filtrated by additional lenses provided by their peers and thus, better papers are produced.

Furthermore, students are likely to make informed and intelligent contributions to the discussion because they had time to consider their initial statements. Also, it is impossible for a student to dominate the discussion since they all have to contribute, in order to reach a result thus equality among group members is achieved. Moreover through this interaction with group mates, students are encouraged to restructure their ideas. For instance, they may need to summarize, elaborate, exemplify, defend, and explain their ideas. Thus, their communication and collaboration skills are likely to develop. Moreover, the discussion of these multiple students' perspectives, is likely to spark new ideas in students' minds, create a positive interdependence among group members and a supportive atmosphere where learners may feel more free to try out new ideas.

After forming and drafting their initial hypothesis, students have to visit the suggested web sites, that include information on the culture history and politics of the country they examined and try to find cultural elements that can support and validate their report.

This extensive reading of various sources will increase students   knowledge of vocabulary , since according to Krashen's (1984) claims students can learn up to 3000 words a year, but as he argues, only a small percentage of such learning is due to direct vocabulary instruction, the remainder being due to acquisition of words from reading. Also this activity increases the students' exposure to the language and that can have positive implications for their reading and writing skills.

In addition, while engaged in this extensive reading, students will to learn how to distinguish different points of view, gain first-hand experience of mass media propaganda and manipulation. They may also develop the ability to gather and organize facts (March 1998) distinguish between facts and fiction, direct statements and implied meaning.

Thus, their critical thinking skills will develop and so will their knowledge of current affairs, social, political, economic issues.

This problem solving activity, may also help students familiarize with the world of journalism and construct a schemata.

Students moreover, besides developing their problem-solving, information processing skills, they also understand (by following the structure of the web quest) the way in depth knowledge can be constructed and acquired.

In addition, this process fosters autonomy and self directed learning since students are not taught directly, but are left to discover - or induce - rules from their experience of using the language. In this way, this inquiry-based course helps the development of students' habits of mind that can last a lifetime and guide learning and creative thinking.

By extension, this self directed learning, as Dodge (1995) supports, facilitates the storage of the new information in the long term memory and promotes in depth learning.

Moreover, the actual speech they will have to give in front of the class empowers their oral presentation, pronunciation skills and builds their confidence in speaking English in front of a group.

The main aim, of this part of the course is, besides helping students improve their writing and reading skills, to assist students break away from habitual and practiced ways of seeing. It also helps students look beyond the surface and find different aspects of events and thus essentially understand language outside the classroom.

In the last part of the course (Evaluation phase) students are involved in self-evaluation, comparing and contrasting what they have produced with other learners and giving feedback on what they feel they have learnt and achieved. This activity encourages learners to be responsible for their own learning and participate in their own development. This reflection on the process, also assists in depth learning as March (1998) claims.

Moreover, students become more autonomous since there are given responsibility for their learning. Similarly, as Deci& Ryan (2000) claim, when students accept responsibility for their learning and believe that success or failure depends on their personal effort become more motivated to participate in the task.

Finally, viewing the learning benefits (see conclusion) can also increase students' motivation and sustain learning since they can be persuaded that this course is personally important for them as individuals in a society, they have a sense of achievement and feel more confident and competent language learners

III. Discussion

Some implications this course may encounter in its application in the classroom, as Seedwood (1994) also points out, may be that not all students will have sufficient background knowledge or interest in the subject, that will enable them to understand the news content, which may hinder their contribution in class and their response to the task. Therefore a balance should be found between more generic topics, that have broader appeal, and headline news, that is likely to be more relevant and of greater interest to students. This could be achieved by identifying students interests before the teacher chooses a news event.

Moreover, the teacher must carefully consider any negative effects an emotive topic like this may have on the students. There might be some friction between learners that have different political beliefs or come from radical conservative backgrounds. However, this is a danger I believe for all the news items dealing with contentious issues. Likewise, a lesson on a topic such as cancer may be interesting for some students but also it may be considered as repulsive and boring by other students in the class. Yet, I believe that our suggested course, in the particular cultural context, does achieve a balance between the relevance of the news item and its potential to motivate all the students in the class.

A further implication, that many teachers (Seedwood, Brown) who argue in favor of the implementation of newspapers in class point out, is that news change rapidly, so even if teaching a news item may be pedagogically sound it newsworthiness and authenticity may easily disappear and perhaps along with it, students' interest.

Finally, the positive merits of this course, as previously presented, are that students are given opportunities for production and opportunities to draw attention to aspects of form in the target language.

Furthermore, this course increases learners exposure to the language and thus increase their knowledge of vocabulary. It also leads to improvement in writing, since not only students are engaged in process writing, but also reading all these provided resources as many L2 studies show, may have a positive effect on their writing skills too.

It also motivates students to read in L2 and builds their confidence in reading and exploring extended texts. It, furthermore, facilitates the development of prediction skills and formation of a schema as well as their critical thinking skills. It also teaches them how to manipulate information to convey personal opinions, and allows to them experience the effect of propaganda and relativity of truth first hand. In addition, it establishes a feeling, as March (1998) observes, of individual expertise.

Moreover, a further advantage of this course, is that it assists retention, of the information since students have to process information, actively interact with each other to transform the new information, so as to meet the sophisticated demands of the task they have to fulfill (March 1998). Furthermore, the authenticity of

the web sites language, familiarize students with a wide range of styles, registers of the target language, and thus their knowledge of cultural and linguistic conventions of the target language is expanded.

IV. Conclusion.

This paper has demonstrated, the pedagogical value of the internet and has put forward a case for using the internet in class by showing the positive and elevating influence, it may have on language teaching and learning. Our web based course, succeeds in developing all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) with out making artificial distinctions between them and thus making language learning appear set of vague skills, that students must master. In terms of literacy acquisition, this course encourages students to not only learn to read and write, but also to read and write to learn new concepts and better understand phenomena to which they have already been exposed or will be exposed in the future. Finally, students are allowed to practice their critical thinking skills in a course that encourages them to generate new ideas, problem-solve through reasoning, focus on different aspects of form in the target language and make the best decisions possible in a given situation. All these merits, however, are very hard, even impossible, to be achieved in traditional course book based class. Thus, I believe that the advantages of using the internet in classroom outweigh the disadvantages and an attempt to implement it in classroom practices should be made

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