

WebQuest as a Fruitful Educational Innovation in ESP Arena

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Abstract

Information Computer Technology (ICT) "has pervaded almost every orifice of modern society" transcending any cultural, physical and spatial borders (Sen & Neufeld, [12]). The World Wide Web offers a rich bounty for ESL / EFL teachers and learners and one of the pioneering methods is Webquests, which "as an inquiry-oriented activity" meets the goals of technology education, which are directed at long-term learning and programmatic outcomes (Ritz [11]). The present paper purports to delineate WebQuest as an activity rife with discovery paths aiming to process and extend novel information, refuting the claim that a WebQuest may just be a relic of the 20th century (Gaskill et al, [7]).

Moreover, there is a direct reference to the structural components of the WebQuest and its entailing utility that can enhance educators' perceptions of its integration in ESP classroom reality. In addition, a plethora of benefits of WebQuest are enlisted surmising that its proper use can succour to collaborative learning, awareness of acculturation and intercultural competence by rendering learners active protagonists of the learning practice. As well, blended learning, multiple literacies, transformative learning and neomillennial learning styles are touched upon in an attempt to highlight the multidimensional impact of the use of Webquests on educational reality.

1. Introduction

The incorporation of ICT in all levels of education has almost become a reality. Still, it may be said that it is Adult Education (AE) that can revive and exploit to the hilt WebQuest as a means of exploring novel modes of approaching and filtering information in a globalized world where emerges an insatiable need for solving any kind of ambiguity stemming from an incrementing amount of information (Dodge, [4]). Thus the bulk of information is to be processed from diverse angles in multiple and critical ways. The scope of this paper pertains to the incorporation of WebQuest more drastically in the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) arena denoting that WebQuest may become a precious tool in the hands of adult learners coping with reality in an unbiased way resisting thus black- white categorization. Moreover, the paper by drawing on an authentic WebQuest, comes up with ideas that aspire to the merging of occupational education with ICT.

2. Symbiosis of ICT and ESP

2.1 ICT and WebQuest-Review of Literature

ICT has permeated Adult Education domain in multifarious ways with WebQuest being a momentous ingredient in the ESP educational agenda. A WebQuest is a quest that almost all of information is retrieved from the Internet. As an inherent part of the resource-based learning, it is often learner-centred, providing raw information to be engaged and interpreted

in a sequence of : 1. Introduction, 2. Task, 3. Process, 4. Evaluation, 5. Conclusion (Dodge [4]).

The functionality and viability of a top-notch WebQuest can be seen more efficaciously via the "lens of 3 Rs of WebQuests", namely "Is it **Real**, **Rich** and **Relevant**?" (March, [8]). A good WebQuest should grapple with real-life issues in a rich context where information can be relevant and moulded into new knowledge. It is a vivid process of collecting, decomposing and synthesising the data. Learners enter into a process of not simply regurgitating the information they find, but also transforming it for the purpose of the given task in a procedure of classifying, inducing, deducing, hypothesizing, analyzing, etc (Dede [3]). It is redolent of *schema theory*, (i.e conceptual organization of information) once learners undergo "a conceptual shift that leads to new schemas and ways of seeing the world" (Gaskill & al, [7]). The scaffolding nature of WebQuest enhances the cultivation of critical thinking that is vital for creative and productive learning. The emergent result is a novel type of transformative learning springing from a procedure that moulds learning input into learning outcome via diverse paths (March [9]).

2.2 ESP Milieu

The traits of the WebQuest explored hitherto are to be refined and address adult learners attending an ESP course in the Ministry of Economic Development, in Rome, Italy. ESP today is more vibrant than ever reflecting the needs of the world's workforce. In such a context the learning materials need to go beyond making the language explicit and engage learners in a process of reconstruction drawing on even the beneficial aspects of the Internet sources. The course is extensive running in tandem with the learners' job. The use of the Webquest can be seen as a latent extension of the initial Learning Contract established between the Institution and the practitioner (Cross [2]). The incorporation of WebQuest in the syllabus can verily reflect and satisfy learners' needs, such as communicating in the real world with a vast range of business vocabulary and communicative skills, as well as writing reports, agendas, or enhancing oral skills. In this way, WebQuest ceases being a monopoly of young learners' pedagogy and constitutes a breakthrough for adult education, once its use guarantees not solely critical thinking and development of multiple literacies, but also contributes to socializing and having fun, which are pivotal elements even for adult learning (Dodge [4]). To put it into a nutshell, the WebQuest's philosophy represents the microcosm of society in its developing processes and relations.

3. Integration of WebQuest in an ESP syllabus

3.1 Underpinning philosophy

The philosophy of the WebQuest in question derives from the need to contextualize learning and render it an immanent component of working life by so reflecting the very principles of Continuing Education (La Marca & Schettini [8]). The input evolves around the ClubEATalian initiative undertaken by the Ministry of Economic Development on promoting Mediterranean diet and Italian cuisine as an alternative to healthy lifestyle in America (see Fig 1). This input is boosted by an *a priori* exposure to the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid (see Fig 2) and an *posteriori* exposure to an upcoming Conference organized on the same issue in London by the Chamber of Commerce that collaborates with the Ministry of Economic Development (see Fig 3). Through a trajectory of research learners are expected to come up with a final product that will be a power-point presentation of their proposal on the issue considering their potential participation in the Conference.

Italian Ministry of Economic Development Presents 'Club EATalian' Initiative to

Promote Healthy Mediterranean Diet and Authentic Italian Food Products

Program Features Nutrition and Healthy Cooking Experts Including UCLA School of Public Health,

Celebrity Chefs and Host of 'Good Food' Radio Show (www.examiner.com/.los)

Fig 1 Promotion of ClubEATalian Initiative

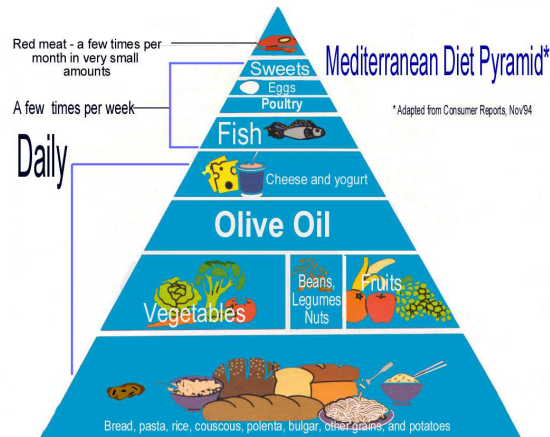


Fig 2: Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

XXXIII Annual Conference



[The Savoy, Strand, London, WC2R 0EU | 14/10/2011]

We are pleased to announce that the next Italian Chamber of Commerce's Annual Conference will be held on Friday, 14th October 2011. (www.italchamind.eu)

Fig 3: Chamber of Commerce's Annual Conference

3.2 Structural & Content Components – Rationale

The trajectory of the WebQuest involves all the interrelated steps by giving an emphatic impetus to both structure and content. Its linear structure encapsulates even a circular consideration of information, as learners have to enter into a process of recycling the data given.

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ls watch the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid (MDP) and comment on it</i> • <i>Ls are exposed to an online text on ClubEATalian initiative</i>
Task	<p><i>You are going to skim an online article on ClubEATalian initiative alluding to the importance of Mediterranean Diet and good Italian food (www.examiner.com/.los).Considering the upcoming conference on the same issue (www.italchamind.eu) and the probability to represent the stance of your Institution and your country you are kindly invited to prepare a power- point presentation <u>on the binary model of modern and healthy eating habits</u> by considering all the aspects of Mediterranean Diet and Italian Cuisine.</i></p>
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Skim through the online text and jot down at least three innovative steps undertaken.</i> • <i>Look carefully at the MDP and consider elements to be inserted (variety of food, hierarchy status, interrelation between levels)</i> • <i>You have to work in groups of four deciding the best elements and actions to be encompassed for a modern and healthy diet.</i> <p><i>(www.mediterraneandiet.gr)</i></p> <p><i>(www.slowfood.com)</i></p> <p><i>(www.vita.gr)</i></p>
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Most interesting sites</i> • <i>Quality of cooperation</i> • <i>Final product as a bridge between learning and working</i>
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Revise all the parameters and analyze their useful incorporation into an immediate future use.</i>

Fig 4: WebQuest on " Ways to promote the "binary" model of modern and healthy Mediterranean diet"

It is crystal clear that the **Introduction** states subtly the scenario by granting adult learners the opportunity to internally process the input via a relentless cognitive process. They are exposed to the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid that can tap their content schemata by thus activating their prior knowledge on the philosophy and benefits of the Mediterranean diet. As being obvious, the **Task** formulation situates learners in a real- life situation of immediate occupational interest, on par with one of the R's (Real) of March's approach by not directing learners towards a politically correct answer, but pointing to the authenticity of their efforts ([9]).

In the same vein, during the **Process** learners enter into a procedure of scaffolding by distilling the diverse sources of Mediterranean diet evincing thus a rich context by firstly exacting an individual expertise, which is projected into a group learning. This resonates a fruitful cooperative learning augmenting Participation in the **COR** (Chain of Response) model

(i.e a model of learning participation that brings together elements such as *self-evaluation, attitudes, goals, participation*) (Cross [2]) leading to *transformative learning* (March [9]). In addition, The **Evaluation** is the phase that manifests introspective and retrospective nuances of the learning practise. Both learners and the practitioner can assess the degree of their actions' effectiveness as an evidence of reflective problem-solving and knowledge, whilst the WebQuest constitutes the bridge between learning and working reality. The entire process is rounded off with the **Conclusion** that focuses on the extensive use of the WebQuest in reality terms, as it can set the ground for an eventual oral presentation in the upcoming Conference on the value of promoting the Mediterranean diet.

4. Epistemic Outcomes

4.1 Benefits of WebQuest's Implementation

All in all, one can assume that there could be a surfeit of benefits by the incorporation of this WebQuest in the ESP learning syllabus. Learners navigate through sites by successfully integrating all four skills and developing new literacies (Dede[3]. In other words, they get immersed in different linguistic genres and styles by developing their business skills as well. At the same time they harness their capacity to use technology effectively aspiring to become a part of the new technology generation, known as *digital natives*, i.e proficient users of technology and it goes without saying that technology has become an endemic part of the developing business world Agolli[1].

In addition, through a penetrative process into the aspects of the Mediterranean diet learners can pinpoint similarities and differences among cultures, cuisines and mentalities and develop **multiple and holistic intelligences**, such as computational, verbal, linguistic and bodily kinesthetic ones (Ritz [11]). They develop even neomillennial learning styles such as fluency in multiple media and communal learning (i.e experience with knowledge distributed across a context and within the individual) (Dede, [3]. They are granted the opportunity to gather this information selectively by setting objectives, priorities and reaching their final goals. The whole process conjures up a learning journey towards the Promised Land.

Moreover, the WebQuest in question boosts content learning with adult learners "learning globally', but deciding locally" insinuating that the global-to-local shift conduces to the transformation of new language rife with regional and cultural tinges (March[9]). Learners are engaged into a **blended learning** as they assess critically the diverse cuisines, by incorporating their very best elements into ClubEATalian cuisine and add them into their Power-point presentation (Ritz [11]) .

4.2 Potential emergent constraints

Last, but not least, the practitioner takes into close consideration that in an ESP context the fruitfulness of the WebQuest can be supplemented by a more profound penetration into other non-Internet sources, as the context is fairly formal. As a result, WebQuest can not be viewed as a panacea, once a lot of expertise is needed along with a good command of language. But, it remains a fact that it triggers learners' interest and inculcates into them a novel orientation towards long-life learning by "supplementing the skills required by companies and by the Labour Market" (La Marca & Schettini [8]).

5. Conclusion

Epitomising, Webquest is an ideal opportunity to engage adult learners in real-life contexts instilling a collaborative spirit and enhancing their critical capacity and intercultural

competence (O' Dowd [10]). Moreover, learners as active European citizens cope with problem-solving situations pertaining to their professional sector reaching a unanimous decision that does not necessarily stand on the part of the mainstream philosophy. This renders adult learners autonomous and capacious to negotiate, survive and thrive in a booming world market which seems to be even the *raison d'être* of Continuing Education in its perception of learning as a process encompassing long-term and programmatic outcomes (Cross [2]).

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