WEBQUEST 2.0

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Abstract: This paper will discuss how web 2.0 technologies can be integrated in a webquest, helping the students even more with various language skills. The Make Your World website (http://turizm.comu.edu.tr/staff/bart/projects/travel/) was created to help students with learning English in a practical, student-centred way, challenging their pre-existing ideas about culture, travelling and tourism, and can easily be used for teaching any language. Using the New London Group's insights on Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), the 10 webquests (Dodge, 1995) approach the content matter from a wide range of angles as they try to challenge some of the traditional views on travelling, in many cases simply by reversing a certain point of view.

Keyword: webquest, web 2.0, social networks, podcast, videocast

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1995, Bernie Dodge (1995) came up with something which would, after some further developments, become one of the biggest New Things in online education: the webquest, a (usually) group-based research activity in which students collect information, and where most of this information comes from the WWW. We have come a long way since those days, and with some of the new tools coming our way in what is commonly called "Web 2.0" applications, it seems perfectly reasonable to wonder what kind of impact these new tools will/can have on the good old webquest.

2. WEB 2.0: SO-SO…?

Before a couple of years ago, the web was a predominantly read-only medium, with the discussion forum being the most notable exception. When Tim O'Reilly coined the term "Web 2.0" (O'Reilly, 2005) something new and exciting was going on: sharing ideas had become easier than ever before, and best of all, all your work could now be published online at the push of a button. While e-mail, FTP and the WWW were still novelty items in 1995, nowadays it's good to mention *Youtube, Flickr, podcasts* and *Web 2.0* at least once a day to the people around you if you have any serious ambitions about getting on in society. Welcome to the world of *social software*.

All these user-friendly solutions share the same goals: to make our life online easier, and to create a community of people, hence the buzzwords social software and social networking. Almost anyone who has a digital photo camera nowadays can also record film clips with it, so no matter where you go, you can make your own documentaries and even add comments about the things you see while you are filming them. With podcasts, you can share your own ideas with other people – imagine walking through a city, and recording your impressions about all the different buildings, statues, cars, vendors and

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supermarkets that you see around you. Walking around becomes a study in ethnography, and a social study in ethnography as soon as other people give you feedback and interact with you.

3. EDUCATION: WEBQUESTS 2.0

With young peoples' parameters for learning nowadays being digital and online, as a teacher you have to know what is going on on the web in order to participate in their world. Students actively engage in many of the online social networks (MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, etc.). Thanks to the new developments on the web, however, many of the assignments teachers had in mind before now require few, if any, really technical skills. Scanning photographs is hardly necessary anymore since digital cameras are quite abundant by now, and even mobile phones are getting multi-megapixel quality cameras. A microphone connected with your computer is enough to have your voice recorded and stored online, and the weblog eliminates the need for those web pages that had to be created before.

When I started designing the Make Your World website, it was clear that I had to aim for a "webquest 2.0" format, so I tried to combine the insights offered by the multiliteracies approach (New London Group, 1996) with the several technologies available online, to make webquests even more interesting than they were before. In order to better grasp the complexity of (mediation of) culture, I took the concept of literacy as a starting point. Key issues of concern were: how do I make my students reflect upon culture in general, upon culture as a social construction, since any kind of (political, religious, cultural) belief is indeed deeply social, embedded in a certain culture and intertwined with the social practices prevalent in that culture.

4. NET: A COLLECTION OF HOLES, TIED TOGETHER WITH STRING

Being a teacher in tourism, travelling and tourism was an obvious choice in terms of content matter; making webquests about travelling and tourism *interesting*, though, is a different kettle of fish. Via a deconstruction of the concept of tourism, taking concepts which are laterally related with the core concept as the basis for the different webquests, I ended up with webquests which focus, for instance, on how grandparents used to travel, some 65 or more years ago, how technology as influenced the way we travel, how travelling to/discovering new countries and continents has had an impact on what we now eat every day, etc. The webquests try to challenge some of the traditional views on travelling, in many cases simply by reversing the point of view. A net as a collection of holes, if you want, tied together with string – a wonderful view of the ocean may produce a tremendous feeling of freedom, Robinson Crusoe rather thought of the sea as his prison.

Taking up these ideas, I wrote some pages with the information about the new Web 2.0 applications I wanted to use, and combined them in a 'technology section' of the website (Bonamie, 2006), in order to familiarize students (and colleagues) who had never heard of these services before. Rather than having the students prepare everything in groups and on paper (where usually the 'smart one' does all the work, and the 'lazy ones'

watch and wait), it was better to have them prepare everything in an online environment such as Google Docs & Spreadsheets (http://docs.google.com). Google Docs has a couple of very interesting things about it: it allows people to write collaboratively, for instance. It is possible to see the changes that have been made to the document in the documents' revision history, and you can even roll back to any version you want. From a teacher's point of view, this is interesting evaluation material, since it gives you a clear picture of who did what, and when. The documents are all stored online, so they can be accessed from anywhere. Moreover, whatever has been prepared online can easily be published online, posted in a weblog, or saved as a Word or PDF file.

Students are invited to use the tools they have available already for some different purposes. Many mobile phones can take pictures, and even record audio and video clips – perfect for an interview, in other words. The ones who have an mp3 player can use it for interviews as well, or for a guided podcast tour as they are walking you through a museum or are giving you an alternative tour of a city.

Usually, the tasks that have been set out in the webquests involve people collecting photos, film clips, mp3 files, etc. online, sometimes with an integrative weblog as a kind of presentation of their work to the world. YouTube (http://www.youtube.com) and Odeo (http://www.odeo.com) even offer you the <object> code you have to insert into your weblog to create a direct link to the work you have just uploaded!

5. FROM TAGS TO RICHES

One of the key features of the social network is called *tagging*. A tag is basically a keyword or category label (a type of metadata, in other words); they help you find videos which have something in common with yours. Many web 2.0 sites (such as YouTube, Flickr, etc.) allow for tagging of the contents uploaded by the users.

Users can assign as many tags as they wish to each clip; as people add video clips to their online collection, they become part of a social network of people who have something in common – not only a love for video and life online, but also a similar interest in the subjects they are filming. Through a tag, people can start to construct dynamic information resources that actually grow and evolve, almost on their own, as they add their work to an existing and growing collection, where through the position amongst the other works with similar tags, it gets new and extra meanings. Using tags, people identify their work as part of the larger group: they position themselves amidst the rest of the group.

Making students explore the tags is an extremely powerful way of learning through serendipity, and as the Flickr Related Tag Browser (http://www.airtightinteractive.com/projects/related_tag_browser/app/) will show, language teachers will immediately come to appreciate some of the tremendous possibilities – for building up paradigms of related vocabulary items, for instance, and to name just one.

6. CONTENT VS. CONVERSATION, LECTURING VS. GUIDING

In the published print world and even, to some degree, with Web 1.0, content arrived as a result of a process. Information was solicited or received, then evaluated, possibly selected, published, and finally distributed by the gatekeeper who had the resources to accomplish the task. In the end, skills are what everything is all about, and thanks to the many web 2.0 services you don't need at least one tech-savvy person per group anymore. Students work online and publish the ideas they have come up with. The border between readers and authors is increasingly disappearing, and from a (language) teacher's point of view, this can only be applauded. The skills they acquire go far beyond being able to digitize something; they learn how to integrate various media, to discuss issues and strategies with their fellow students, and to look up the information they need in order to fulfil the assignment.

Another important implication for teaching and learning is the motivational power of making our students a part of the global conversation. There are many stories out there about students who become engaged, because they are writing or speaking to an authentic audience and having their ideas responded to by that audience.

Beyond the obvious need to teach students to be their own gatekeepers, it is essential for teachers to keep in mind that even though much of what is published online in the various weblogs is trivial, some of it *does* comprise important ideas from serious and thoughtful people. In times of rapid change, the answers to brand new questions will often come, not from a book that was published five years ago or an expert who earned their PhD a decade ago, but from something that somebody said yesterday – an important resource that we (educators) need to learn and teach how to use!

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