Internet Treasure Hunts - A Treasure of an Activity for Students Learning English

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Introduction

The most successful activity I have been using involving the Internet and the World Wide Web is *Internet Treasure Hunts* (or *Scavenger Hunts*as they are alternatively known).

In an *Internet Treasure Hunt* students, working cooperatively in groups of two or three to a computer connected to the WWW, use Netscape to search for answers to a variety of questions by searching various Web sites and pages for the answers. There are a number of such activities already prepared, online and free to use from Web pages that include hyperlinks to the sites that need to be accessed to find the answers to the hunt. This means a search engine does not need to be used in these *Treasure Hunts*. Several of the *Online Treasure Hunts*have been specifically designed for ESL students and the Internet TESL Journal at http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/th/ maintains a useful link to a collection of these.

Other prepared *Treasure Hunts* can be found on the WWW. Some are for ESL students and others are designed for Primary or High school students but can often be used with ESL students as well. Alternatively, teachers can make up their own and even publish them on the web through their own homepage or through a site such as the Internet TESL Journal. A variation on the *Treasure Hunt,* which includes hyperlinks to the sites where the answers are found, is one without these links necessitating the use of search engines. Although this is easier for the teacher to prepare it is far more difficult for students to complete and I recommend them for use only with students who are of particularly high level and fully conversant with the use of the Internet. A further variation of the unlinked *Treasure Hunt* is the Web Quest which is a longer term project designed for native speakers that involves more complicated tasks, than just answering a few questions, and can take weeks to complete. This type of quest is less suitable for my teaching situation but could be very valuable for teachers in a different situation. (http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/webquest.html has more information on these.)

Background

The students I teach are mostly young adults from Asian and European countries aged in their twenties although sometimes there are a few older students in their thirties or forties. Their educational background is mixed with most having graduated from high school and many, but not all currently undertaking or having graduated from university or college in their home countries. Others have various types of work experience. Some students have never traveled outside of their home countries before and enter the college immediately on their arrival in Sydney so that it is their first experiences outside of their home countries. Most have graduated high school or college in their home country and some have varied work experience. Although, some students have been exposed to different styles of language learning at other private language institutions in Australia or their home countries, many are only familiar with the style of language teaching used in the high schools and colleges of their home countries which in many cases means a strong leaning to Grammar Translation methodology. Students are learning English in Australia for a variety of reasons including to continue on to further study in Australia, to enhance their job prospects in their home countries or to make friends with Australians and get more out of their stay in Australia. Class size at any time is around 10 to 15 students and includes a mix of male and female. At Intermediate level students will have been exposed to at least 900 hour of English and their level corresponds to an approximate rating on the ASLPR scale of between 2 and 3 for the four macros skills.

Computer knowledge and skills of the students is mixed with some quite conversant with using Netscape and the Internet whilst others are just using it for the first time.

The World Wide Web

The WWW can be thought of as the largest library in the world, with Web sites the equivalents of books, full of information in English on almost any topic that can be imagined making it a vast storehouse of free and authentic materials for the ESL teacher to use. The Web pages contain not only text and pictures but also sounds, music, animation and movies and are linked together differently to the linear method of books and page numbers through the use of hyperlinks whereby clicking on a textual or graphic link transports you directly to a different page in a different book.

Linda Mak on http://www.hku.hk/ssrc/newLearn.html lists some ways in which language learning on the Web is different from conventional classroom learning.

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Traditional Language Learning        Web-based Language Learning
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Linear presentation                  Hypertext, Multimedia
Not motivating                       High motivation
Receptive learning                   Self-paced, Self-access
High teacher control                 High learner control
One-to-many (teacher to students)    Individual + many to many
Limited resources                    Unlimited, update information
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Relevant to *Internet Treasure Hunts* she goes on to say

> Let me take a few examples to show you how the WWW provides more choices and resources for language learners than conventional classrooms or self-access learning centres. Conventionally, when we read a passage or an essay in print form, the information is linear and there is only one route for readers to continue. Though you may choose to skim or skip any part, the passage is an end in itself. On the WWW, however, information is presented in hypertext and multi-routes are permitted. You may stop at any point to click on a highlighted phrase and jump to other support information, such as a glossary of difficult/ technical terms, the background of the author or society, the pronunciation of words, etc. What's more interesting is: there can be no end to the WWW document you are reading, as you may read a related document written by another author and follow links after link to browse around WWW documents in different parts of the world.

Warschauer in his article in the Internet TESL Journal http://iteslj.org/Articles/Warschauer-Internet.html lists some guidelines for using the Internet for teaching English:

1. Consider Carefully Your Goals
2. Think Integration
3. Don't Underestimate the Complexity
4. Provide Necessary Support
5. Involve Students in Decisions

He links the learner centred curriculum to the Internet enhanced classroom and proposes that the 'teachers contribution in a learner centred, network enhanced classroom include coordinating group planning, focusing students' attention on linguistic aspects of computer mediated texts, helping students gain meta-linguistic awareness of genres and discourses, and assisting students in developing appropriate learning strategies. The following lesson plan for *Internet Treasure Hunts* tries to keep these guidelines in mind.

Objectives & Outcomes

1. The linguistic focus in this activity is on reading with the focus on students scanning through web pages and using hyperlinks to find the specific answers to their questions. Students will examine pictures, titles, headlines, menus and indexes for clues to find the answers. Students should use their knowledge to predict where the answer can be found and what links to follow whilst

skipping through areas that are unlikely to have the answer.

2. When using the program in a class lesson I have two or three students working together on a computer thus involving them in cooperative learning. This provides a range of communicative benefits not inherent in use of the program by a single student to the computer, which is better, suited for a self-access activity rather than a class one. Using the computer in cooperative learning facilitates a range of authentic communicative benefits as the students work together to find the answers to the questions, agreeing, disagreeing, offering opinions and helping each other.

3. A further outcome of use of this activity is that it familiarises students with web browser use and navigation on the WWW through the use of hyperlinks. It acquaints them to the nature of the web and its format and gives them a sampling of the vast resources that are available. All this prepares students for more detailed research on the Web using search engines at a later time.

Advantages of CALL

The advantages of building on reading skills using the computer, Internet and hyperlinks are increasingly becoming evident in CALL. Moore in his article on reading on the Internet says (1998, p.326) "There is little doubt that the Internet can bring access to a much wider range of information and resources than are currently available in most classrooms." Vast amounts of information on any topic are accessible through the web and navigation with the use of hyperlinks is far faster and better suited to scanning than linear print media. All materials are real and authentic use of language that is generally very current and up to date. Students usually find using the Internet interesting and challenging and this generally increases their motivation to complete the task. Ganderton in his article on L2 reading on the World Wide Web mentions many of the issues involved with reading on the web (1998, pp. 2-3) including what he calls the 'crucial difference between the reading of printed text and hypertext' which is the "nonlinear nature of hypertext" in contrast to the sequential nature of printed text. 'This has profound implications for the interactive view of L2 reading and the processes and strategies associated with it.'

Whilst the activity has no communicative content inherent in itself, by using cooperative learning and having two or three students working together on the one computer to complete it, communicative benefit can be gained when to solve the tasks not only must students scan through the material but they must communicate their ideas and thoughts together. Ben Shneideman, a keynote speaker at the WorldCALL conference at Melbourne University in July 1998 stressed that the use of co-operative learning with CALL is one of its strongest benefits. McKay and Robinson (1997 p. 17) echo this sentiment, as do many others. 'Computers can provide opportunities for cooperative learning. Students are able to pool their knowledge and enhance peer correction as they work together.' The cooperative efforts of students working together to complete the listening exercises gives the use of the program a range of communicative benefits, lacking within the exercises of the program itself, when they converse on what the answers should be. Sussex calls this the 'social dimension of CALL' (1998). Nunan (1993 pp. 82-83) talks about the importance of pair and group work in providing opportunities for learners to use and improve language in an individual manner as well as to increase motivation. As a further refinement I always insist on mixed nationality groups, as they must communicate in the common language of English to be able to proceed in the program. Coleman (1996, p. 24) has the same idea. 'All CALL lessons are undertaken with the students working in mixed nationality pairs'. This activity like others I use in the CALL lab is one which exemplifies the advantages of using CALL for cooperative learning.

Link to the Curriculum

Since in my teaching situation the curriculum is built around weekly themes, *Internet Treasure Hunts* can be quite easily linked to the curriculum by linking the theme of the hunt to the weekly theme of the class. For example hunts from the Internet TESL Journal site can be linked to such weekly themes as travel, interests, media and technology. For students intending to complete further study, using the Internet for research is increasingly becoming important, thus this activity which links improving language skills with learning Internet skills is especially relevant to them because it builds on their Internet skills and introduces them to researching on the Web.

Set Up, Time, Resources & Equipment

Faster modem or cable connection is preferred for speed of connection as is a recent release version of a web browser loaded with current plug ins, to handle the many new features of web pages around nowadays. A handout of the questions is also recommended which can just be a printout from the web page.

With my intermediate class I will need at least 90 minutes, more likely 120, for one *Treasure Hunt* but this time can vary according

to the students' level of English and familiarity with use of the web browser.

Role of the Teacher

With students unfamiliar to the WWW and use of a web browser the teachers' role is made far more difficult as they must become an Internet teacher as well as an ESL one. The teacher must introduce the workings of the web browser and the concept of the Internet to those Internet novice students. During the activity the teacher is kept busy monitoring the students' progress and intervening to help when they cannot find an answer or start moving to the wrong links. The teacher has an essential role in lubricating smooth running of the program for the students by problem solving when they get stuck or lost. Technical problems with the Internet requiring restart of the program or even the computer can and do happen sometimes when using the Internet so the teacher must also be able to do a little technical problem solving as well. Especially when conducting this activity for the first time conducting this lesson can be very exhausting for the teacher.

Procedure

At the beginning of my lesson I allocate the students to which partner or partners I want them to work with. Where possible I choose students to work with students of a different nationality in all CALL activities so that they cannot use their native language and cancel out the communicative benefits of cooperative learning. In this activity I match computer novices with those more experienced at using the WWW and where possible I also will mix weaker students with stronger students on the same computer.

I begin by explaining what activity we are going to do and what benefits there are for the students in doing this. Explaining to the students what expected outcomes there are for them in using the computer, greatly enhances their interest and motivation in using the activity. This leads to more satisfaction on their part and should enhance the benefits of the activity as well. I include a quick review of the Internet, the WWW and Web browsing. Whilst the students gather around me and I demonstrate the controls and procedures for doing the activity. I discuss the meaning of treasure hunts, introduce the activity and explain the linguistic goals for doing the activity. I do this quite fully each time, even if most of the students have already done this before.

Next, I pass out a handout of the questions to each group on which they can write the answers. I circulate among the groups observing their progress and assisting where required when they get stuck or lost. Sometimes clarification is required as to why a certain path is required but in general when the correct answer is found the meanings become self evident. Students work at their own speed. At the intermediate level I usually devote 90 minutes to this activity. It is rare for any group to finish with much time to spare. Some groups will not be able to complete the full hunt in this time. It is usually not necessary to go through the answers at the end of the lesson because during my monitoring I have checked all the groups' answers as they are doing it. This is preferable so that the students can see where the answers have come from.

Assessment & Evaluation

I am able to assess students' progress through the activity as I am closely monitoring their progress throughout the activity. The speed and ease with which they are able to get through the activity is another measure of their progress. Student evaluation of use of this activity is available by having students fill in an evaluation questionnaire. Feedback on use of this activity from my students is generally very positive. Not only do they acknowledge the value for their reading skills but they also like improving their Internet skills and appreciate the communicative benefits of cooperative learning involved in this activity.

Difficulties & Problems

Technical problems such as the slow speed of the Internet as seen in time delays for pages to load up can be a hindrance leading to wasted time whilst students just wait for the page to load. Web pages often change or disappear and this can happen overnight so it is quite possible for the links to a treasure hunt that worked a week ago to suddenly not work anymore and one needs to be prepared for this.

Students' lack of Internet knowledge can be a serious impediment to the activity as well, which is why I match novices with those more experienced. If a class is made up a majority of novices it will be difficult to carry out the activity as time will be spent on learning to navigate and use the web browser rather than on the linguistic reading goals. In this case I advocate first carrying out some

other lessons or activities to familiarise students with the web prior to attempting this activity. Another difficulty that can arise with students is that of student 'Luddites'. Some students will not accept the use of the Internet and computers as a method of language learning and will be disinterested or even antagonistic to this activity. Discussing the linguistic goals and advantages of this activity on the computer in detail at the beginning of the lesson, as suggested, is one way to win over some of these students.

Further Activities

Online Newspapers

Activity Outline

Accessing English language news from around the world on the WWW opens up numerous possibilities for language teaching. An activity I regularly carry out with my class is an adjunct to another weekly activity that all students in the class do which is summarising and giving an oral report on a newspaper article. Usually students find this article in the local newspaper but once a month or so for variety and for an activity in its own right I have the students access the WWW to find their articles from different English language newspapers from all over the world. A central page for newspapers from around the world can be found at http://www.webwombat.com.au/intercom/newsprs/index.htm or another is http://www.tcom.ohiou.edu/OU_Language/news/paper.html.

Students browse the newspaper of a country of their choice till they find a suitable article which is then printed out. Students read the article and prepare their presentation for homework . Time permitting, I also have the students use the Web to get some background information on the place that the newspaper article comes from. This is particularly relevant when the place is not a well known locality.

Using the Internet to find a newspaper story rather than the local paper has a number of advantages. The Internet provides free access to hundreds of English language newspapers.. There is no other single method to access all these papers so efficiently and the cultural benefits that come with this can also not be duplicated in another manner. The WWW and the web browser provide a convenient means of browsing articles to find a suitable story that when found can simply be printed out to hard copy for use at home. As with the treasure hunts using the web builds on students' web skills and also provides opportunities for cooperative learning that are not available with cutting up a newspaper.

Objectives & Outcomes

This activity has a number of interlinking objectives. On a linguistic level it involves building on reading skills in the scanning of various articles by students in order for them to choose one they feel suitable and comfortable with to prepare their presentations. On another level, as with Treasure Hunts, it builds on the students knowledge of the WWW as well as the use of web browsers for its navigation. A further level is the expanding of the students' cultural awareness by their exposure to different viewpoints from various countries from all over the world. Cooperative learning can be used allowing students to find suitable stories together.

The preparation of the newspaper presentation involves the students in reading their articles in detail and understanding the new vocabulary they come across. Their knowledge of current affairs as well as social, political and economic issues is expanded. In the case of news stories from newspapers foreign to either their home country or Australia, they are able to make comparisons with how these same issues are reported and dealt with in different countries thereby expanding their cultural awareness. The actual oral presentation of their reports helps to build on their oral presentation skills, pronunciation and confidence in speaking English in front of a group. Furthermore it allows students to express their own opinions and ideas on current issues in the news and where possible to lead to a class discussion on these issues.

Movie Reviews

Activity Outline

This activity is built around accessing the Internet and the WWW for information on movies that can later be viewed by the class. Movies especially those from Hollywood are universally popular with students of all nationalities and provide a point of common interest for the varied nationalities in the target group. There is a tremendous amount of information on movies on the WWW. This

includes not only, web pages with pictures and information about particular actors and movies but preview video clips in Quicktime and other formats that can be viewed through the web browser or downloaded to individual computers. In addition there are numerous reviews from a variety of sources, songs from movies that can be listened to with Real Audio and full scripts of a movie that can be downloaded as well as viewed on screen, sometimes available even before the movie is released in theatres. Almost any detail concerning the movie or its making can be found somewhere on the WWW.

Although search engines can be used to find this information, sites such as The Internet Movie Database at http://us.imdb.com/ are very comprehensive and will provide more than enough information for class use. This site claims to have information on more than 160,000 titles and this includes video clips and reviews where available. Prior to viewing, a movie either at the theatre or on video, students can use the web to thoroughly research the movie reading reviews, movie synopsis and even viewing preview video clips. Various activities can be built around these materials found on the Internet including reading and vocabulary building exercises as well as listening exercises from the video clips. I particularly like to concentrate on reviews of the movie and have the students write their own review after they have viewed the movie.

Finding information about movies on the WWW is far easier, quicker and cheaper than using print media. With the increasing availability of video and sound clips on the Internet and because of the sheer volume of available data as well, it is also the superior method to get this information. The different materials obtained from the web can be used in a variety of ways such as using the downloaded Quicktime or AVI video clips as listening exercises.

Objectives & Outcomes

As with the *Treasure Hunts,* Internet skills and navigation of the WWW are enhanced by this activity which also is carried out as a cooperative learning activity providing associated communicative benefits. Practice at using search engines is applicable when the information is accessed in that manner. I concentrate on movie reviews because they provide a focal point for discussion and comparison. The genre of movie reviews is analysed and compared in several reviews of the movie and used by the students to write their own review after they view the movie. Also after the movie discussion can ensue on which reviews the students agreed and disagreed with. Specific objectives relevant to particular follow up activities will apply according to the activity and these include improving students' reading skills, listening skills, vocabulary and confidence and ability to express their own opinions. Finally researching the movie, doing the follow up activities thereby knowing about the story and what to expect can help in improving the students understanding of the movie when they view it.

Making Your Own

The Internet TESL Journal has a page on how to write treasure Hunts for ESL Students at http://www.aitech.ac.jp/iteslj/th/project.html.

This page then has some advice on HTML basics and a further link There is also a quick start guide to HTML at http://iteslj.org/Articles/web-page/.

Conclusion

Moore in his article on reading and writing on the Internet looks at the nature of texts on the Internet and how to use them for the development of literacy. He mentions (1996, p.319) the way literacy is changing with the growth of the Internet and this was also referred to by Mary Kalantzis in her opening speech. As we go into the new Millennium ESL teachers must increasingly be able to teach students to deal with this new literacy the Internet is propagating. *Internet Treasure Hunts* are an entertaining and effective approach to this task, as well as to more traditional reading outcomes that when conducted in cooperative learning situations have the additional benefit of communicative learning.

Appendix

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http://www.hku.hk/ssrc/newLearn.html
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  http://iteslj.org/Articles/Warschauer-Internet.html

Useful URL's

- English newspaper sites from around the world
  - http://www.webwombat.com.au/intercom/newsprs/index.htm
  - http://www.tcom.ohiou.edu/OU_Language/news/paper.html
- Internet Movie Database http://us.imdb.com/
- Internet TESL Journal http://www,aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj
- Internet Treasure Hunts http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/th/
- Scavenger Hunts
  - http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/resources/TESOL/ Heidi/HTOscavenger.html
- Web Quests http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/webquest.html