

# Improving Korean High School Students' Communication Skills by Promoting Meaningful Interaction through Using WebQuests

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## I. Introduction

In the past, the grammar translation method (GTM) dominated Korean EFL field. At that time, learning a new language meant getting some amount of linguistic knowledge and being able to translate written forms. Emphasizing only on grammatical competence among the four components of communicative competence (Canale, 1983) resulted in bringing negative effects on Korean students with lack of communicative skills. According to the recently revised 7<sup>th</sup> curriculum of Korea, the aim of learning English is to improve students' communicative competence and help the students become autonomous learners by developing their abilities to think critically and independently. Although a number of teachers in Korea realize the vital needs for improving students' communicative competence, there appears to be several obstacles that prevent teachers from conducting classes based on communicative curriculum which include teachers' low level of spoken English proficiency, lack of authentic materials, insufficient amount of time to teach assigned textbook content, and the heavy emphasis on receptive skills in KSAT (Choi, 1999). Due to the increasing needs of communicative skills in this globalized world, the Ministry of Education should take an active stance to accommodate the needs by developing a curriculum which not only focuses on the grammatical competence but also balances out the importance of the other three communicative competences: discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence through interaction and the negotiation of meaning.

In order to solve the problems mentioned above, WebQuest, the inquiry-based learning, can be offered as one of the good solutions. It is a student-centered program focused on questioning, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Through this curriculum, students can develop not only their linguistic level but also their cognitive level.

Therefore, to accomplish those goals, this project aims to provide an inquiry based curriculum which can play a role as a practical material to help learners improve their communicative skills by extracting the most frequently used topics from new 10th grade textbooks.

## **II. WebQuest**

### **1. What is a WebQuest?**

A WebQuest according to Dodge (1997), is "an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet" (Definitions, para. 1). It is an instructional tool which is based on Project Based Learning (PBL), learner-centered, inquiry-based and constructivist approaches to learning in which learners interact with resources on the web, enhance cooperative learning skills, develop critical thinking and decision-making skills, and engage in higher level thinking (Dodge, 1998; Hopkins-Moore & Fowler, 2002; Matejka (2004). Students are provided with an authentic task which gives the learning situation a purpose and meaning and are encouraged to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information.

### **2. Structure of a WebQuest**

WebQuests are generally divided into four stages:

1) Introduction: This part provides descriptive background information on the topic. In the language learning context, key vocabulary and concepts which learners will need to understand for completing the assigned tasks are usually presented.

2) Task: This section provides a clear and detailed explanation of what the tasks are. The tasks should be interesting enough to highly motivate the learners and should be strongly connected with a real-life situation. They sometimes include role-plays. (e.g. Your family is going to a trip to an English-speaking country and you are in charge of planning a trip because your parents are too busy at work.)

3) Process: In this stage, the learners use a set of predefined resources which are usually hyperlinked within a task document. In a language-based WebQuest, this stage of the WebQuest may contain lexical areas or grammatical points which are essential for completing the task. The Process stage of the WebQuest will usually have one or several "outcome(s)" which the learners are expected to present at the end. These "outcome(s)" will often form the basis of the Evaluation stage.

4) Evaluation: In this part, learners' self-evaluation can be involved. Learners will compare and contrast what they have produced with other learners and give feedback on what they have learned, achieved, and how they feel about the task. It will involve teacher evaluation in the form of a rubric.

### **3. Characteristics of a WebQuest**

Besides the systematic structure, what differentiates WebQuests from standard

thematic unit is that "the former are focused on topics that students are to learn about and the latter are focused on problems that students are to solve" (Gunter, Estes, & Schwab, 2003). The problem comes from the topic which is covered in classroom. The distinguishing feature of a WebQuest lies in the instructional approach it requires. WebQuests create an open-ended learning opportunities for students and teachers. The underlying principle of a WebQuest is to pose a problem for students to solve with the resources provided for them to help them learn the topic of interest in the curriculum. WebQuests provide practical ways for students to acquire information and participate in meaningful activities including debates, presentations, and role-plays which promote them to be more involved and active throughout the learning process (Watson, 1999).

#### **4. Reasons for Using WebQuests**

There are several reasons for using WebQuests in the classroom, including the following:

- 1) It is one of the easy ways for teachers to adopt the Internet into the language classroom either a short-term and long-term basis. Specialist technical knowledge is not required to produce or use them.
- 2) Through the activities using WebQuests, teacher can achieve two principal goals of language teaching: Most of the time, they are conducted as group activities, thus encouraging students to interact and share knowledge with group members. In sum, students learn and practice language and improve their cooperation skill at the same time.
- 3) WebQuests provide a situation to practice and reinforce linguistic goals.
- 4) WebQuests encourage critical thinking skills including listing, comparing, classifying, analyzing, evaluating, and etc. Learners have to modify information they find in order to achieve a given task in order to achieve a given task.
- 5) They include authentic tasks, thus encouraging learners' motivation. As a result, learners put more effort and focus into completing the real tasks to achieve the goal.

### **III. Adopting WebQuests in the Classroom**

#### **1. Analysis of Revised 7th Curriculum Textbooks**

Researchers chose four English textbooks which were recently developed based on the revised 7th curriculum.

#### **2. Most Frequently Used Topics**

- 1) Future
- 2) Technology
- 3) Environment

- 4) Art
- 5) Korean Culture
- 6) Others (e.g., travel, food, school life, social issues, etc.)

### 3. A Sample WebQuest Design

#### Win the prize for the one-day NYC trip!!!



Follow the links below to get started.

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#### Introduction

Attention!!!  
Did you hear the news from OSSE student union?  
They are having a contest on planning a one-day trip to New York City. This event is for the every OSSE high school students.

If you win the contest, you will get the prize for a trip to New York City. It includes air tickets, accommodation, and money for your sightseeing. Now is the time to enter for this contest with your group members!

**Can we start??**



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#### Task



Your assignment is to make a plan of one-day trip to **New York City**. During this activity, you will prepare a detailed plan of your one-day trip with your group members. You will need to search on the internet and make your schedule of the trip. Then you will make a brochure about your plan for the trip as a final product. It is highly recommended to include some photos and rationales on your brochure.

Make sure that this is a **one-day** (6 a.m. - 10 p.m.) road trip. You have money limit **\$600** for each group. Within that amount of money, you will make an interesting and unforgettable trip. The due date is **June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008**.

**Remind you!!!**  
**If you win the contest, you will have a chance for the free trip.**

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#### Process

**Step One:** Make a group of four and divide your group according to the roles presented below so that each person is responsible for each role.

- **Group leader:** Group leader will check the whole process of the trip and responsible for group meeting arrangement and final product submitting.
- **Money keeper:** Since you have money limit (\$600) for each group, money keeper will keep an eye on the group expenditure. You will make a "spending money chart". How does your money spent to given budget will be evaluated.
- **Time keeper:** This is a one day trip. The time keeper will make a time table to make sure the plan is for just one day.
- **Path keeper:** You have time limit, only one day. You will keep the track of the route. You are the person who makes the moving path the most efficiently including appropriate transportation.

**Step Two:** There are several requirements that you have to keep in mind.

- The trip starts at 6:00 a.m. and ends at 10:00 p.m.
- You have to include at least two meals with exact price.
- You are requiredly submit at least one performance. (It can be movie, opera, sports game, and so on.)
- You will make a money spending chart.
- You will mark the track of your route on the map with transportation included.
- You will provide references that you consulted.

**Step Three:** Make a brochure and upload to the school web (Bulletin Board) for voting. Voters will students in other classes and teachers.



#### Step Four: Make a vote for the most attractive plan from other class. Each class should vote only for the designated class.

Your Class	V1	V2	V3
You will vote for	1-2	1-3	5-5

You can refer to the following useful websites.

- **Travel info**
  - 1. <http://usa.visa.com>
  - 2. <http://www.usatoday.com>
  - 3. <http://usa.visa.com/embassies/usa.html>
- **Public transportation**
  - 1. <http://www.mta.com>
  - 2. <http://www.mta.com/mta/mta.html>
  - 3. <http://www.mta.com/mta/mta.html>
- **Entertainment**
  - 1. <http://usa.visa.com>
  - 2. <http://www.usatoday.com>
  - 3. <http://usa.visa.com/embassies/usa.html>
- **Map**
  - 1. <http://usa.visa.com>
  - 2. <http://www.usatoday.com>
  - 3. <http://usa.visa.com/embassies/usa.html>



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#### Evaluation

	1	2	3	4
<b>Required Element</b>	The brochure includes all the required elements.	A brochure is attached to the plan.	A brochure is attached to the plan.	A brochure is attached to the plan.
<b>Information Resource</b>	1. Reasons for place choice. 2. Trip means. 3. List of points of interest. 4. Money spending plan. 5. A map with track.	1. Reason for place choice. 2. Trip means. 3. List of points of interest. 4. Money spending plan. 5. A map with track.	1. Reason for place choice. 2. Trip means. 3. List of points of interest. 4. Money spending plan. 5. A map with track.	1. Reason for place choice. 2. Trip means. 3. List of points of interest. 4. Money spending plan. 5. A map with track.
<b>Attractiveness</b>	The money spent on the 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place of group.	The money which are the 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place of group.	The money which are the 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place of group.	The money which are the 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place of group.
<b>Budget</b>	Budget of 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place.	Budget of 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place.	Budget of 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place.	Budget of 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place.
<b>Language</b>	There are less than 10 errors in the brochure.	There are 10-15 errors in the brochure.	There are 15-20 errors in the brochure.	There are 20-30 errors in the brochure.

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#### Conclusion



Congratulations!!! You have finished the task!

**Now you are able to:**

- cooperate within a group,
- surf the internet to find out information, pictures, ideas etc.,
- select the relevant information and elaborate them,
- organize a real trip to New York City,
- present your work in a creative way,
- make a brochure in English,
- evaluate other students' work.



This experience of making a plan will be very useful to you in the future.

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### IV. Conclusion and Limitation

This proposal is based on the revised 7th English textbooks, thus offers a way to

use the WebQuests in high school settings. Learners will have an opportunity to improve their communicative, cooperative, and critical thinking skills through using WebQuests. However, it is difficult to note that this can only be run in classrooms where they have access to the Internet. As an alternative for running the WebQuest curriculum at school where they don't have access to the Internet, we suggest that the teachers use the WebQuest as an instruction-based learning so that learners will be able to search the information as a homework. In this globalized world, it is necessary for learners to be equipped with communicative skills. We hope that this proposal would be able to make contribution in improving the quality of English Education.

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