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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND WEBQUEST METHODOLOGY: A POSSIBILITY FOR INQUIRY-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES ON THE WEB

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### ABSTRACT

This article is about the teaching of English Language (EL) through the use of active methodologies, in particular the WebQuest Methodology (WQM). It is part of a Professional Master Degree's research of a Graduate Program of the Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA), including new discussions. The aim of this study is to reflect and raise methodological possibilities to English classes in the digital age considering the concept of active methodologies teaching. This is a bibliographical research regarding the procedures and exploratory type relating to the objectives. We are based on theoretical contributions that address the teaching of English language, as well as the WebQuest methodology (WQM) with the contributions of Dodge (1995; 1997; 2001; 2002), Almeida Filho (2013; 2015), Paiva (2015), Bottentuit Júnior (2009; 2010; 2012), Barato (2012) and Bacich; Moran (2018). Thus, we hope that this study can contribute to teachers' reflection on the need of using digital technologies in the teaching of EL in a communicative approach. Therefore, the application of WebQuest methodology is an active and significant possibility in the teaching of EL in the school context. In addition, we found out that the English teacher needs to reinvent himself/herself depending on the adopted methodology, especially in this moment of pandemic, in which the use of digital resources is urgent.

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## INTRODUCTION

English language teaching has been transforming and adapting over time, not only regarding the use of teaching methodologies or approaches, but also the integration of digital technologies, in order to keep up with the changes that society has been going through. In this sense, the integration of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT) has been used as viable didactic tools, with the aim of helping to promote more meaningful learning in the school context, in particular for the English language teaching. Therefore, for the teacher to contemplate possibilities that encourage the engagement of his/her students in his/her teaching practices, it is important that he/she seeks to understand cyberculture. This term was cited by Pierre Lévy, specifying that cyberspace is the environment for the virtualization of communication (LÉVY, 2005), that is, the one that will integrate the universe of Generation Y or millennials<sup>1</sup>, Generation Z<sup>2</sup>, which is also called *Homo Zappiens*<sup>3</sup> and, in sequence, the most recent — the Generation Alpha (or *Alpha*)<sup>4</sup>.

With regard, above all, to the English Language, object of our study, Web 2.0 (also called Social Web) becomes a potential communication tool, especially after the advent of the globalization phenomenon<sup>5</sup>, since it is considered the commercially, digitally and socially language used. In this technological environment, which has advanced and been part of our daily routine, Foreign Language teachers, in order to have a dynamic dialogue with the so-called Web 2.0, see a range of digital tools that can be incorporated into educational practices, because, according to Vandresen (2011, p. 4), "[...] Web 2.0 presents a large number of services, many of them offered by websites that allow high levels of interaction, sharing,

differentiate between online and offline life, use cell phones (smartphones) all the time, and want everything for now, as they have a different relationship with time. (CERETTA; FROEMMING, 2011 *apud* MUSSIO, 2017).

<sup>3</sup>Term quoted by Veen and Vrakking (2009) to name a generation that has an intimate relationship with technology and the way in which both are related from their contextualization through the practice and experimentation of technology.

<sup>4</sup>Formed by the children of *millennials*, [...] it will be the first generation for which many aspects of the analog world seem far removed from their reality. (BORRULL, 2019).

<sup>5</sup>[...] Worldwide phenomenon or process of integration or sharing of information, cultures and markets. = MUNDIALIZATION. (PRIBERAM DICTIONARY OF THE PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE, 2020).

<sup>1</sup>Those born between 1980 and 1996 and characterized by greater use and familiarity with means of communication and digital technologies. (BORRULL, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>Those born in 1995 and later, who did not know the world without the Internet, cannot

exchange of opinions that were not possible before it.” The objective of this study is to reflect and raise methodological possibilities in English classes in the digital age, considering mainly the expansion of teaching mediated by digital technologies in the pandemic context. This is a bibliographic research regarding the procedures, as “it is developed from a material already prepared, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles.” (GIL, 2008, p. 50). About the objectives, this is an exploratory study and, according to Gil (2008, p. 27), “exploratory researches are developed with the objective of providing an overview of approximate type about a certain fact. This type of research is carried out especially when the chosen theme is little explored.”

We are based on theoretical contributions that address the English language teaching, eminently of Applied Linguistics, such as: Almeida Filho (2013; 2015) and Paiva (2015). About the area of active methodologies, including the WebQuest methodology (WQM), we rely on references of the following scholars: Dodge (1995; 1997; 2001; 2002), Bontentuit Júnior (2009; 2010; 2012), Barato (2012) and Bacich; Moran (2018). We expect that this study can serve as a stimulus and source of reflection for other English language (EL) teachers who are looking for new ways to teach and instigate their students and co-workers in the daily construction of knowledge. For didactic reasons, we divided this text into five sections. In the first section, we show the need to insert new methodologies that integrate English language teaching and digital technologies. In the second section, we expose on active and significant teaching technologies. In the third section, we present the WebQuest methodology, in the perspective of an inquiry-oriented activity on the Web. In the fourth section, we demonstrate the use of the WebQuest for English language teaching methodology. Finally, we outline the final considerations showing how the application of the WebQuest methodology is configured as an active and significant possibility in the English Language teaching.

**English language teaching and digital technologies:** In the educational context, Web 2.0 presents a wide variety of digital tools, which can be used for the disciplines taught in the Brazilian educational scenario and, regarding English language teaching, it is no different. However, one of the educational issues we consider relevant is the language teacher, firstly, to have knowledge of the digital resources available on the Network to better choose and apply the appropriate digital tools for the discipline he/she teaches. It is also essential that the teacher feels the need to use technologies methodologically, as they alone do not act solely to promote learning, especially when the subject is the English language teaching. According to Lacerda *apud* Almeida Filho (2015, p. 72), the characteristics of an innovative class in a university teacher training course were mapped at the University of Brasília (UnB) and the most cited characteristics were: “research articulated with teaching, creativity, autonomy, interdisciplinarity, good teacher-student relationship, use of new technologies and good resolution of the theory and practice axis in the classroom.” In other words, the above report points out that teaching nowadays requires new methodologies, as student-subjects have other expectations, desires and learning needs. Bacich and Moran (2018) also highlight that students in the knowledge society require the teacher to focus on understanding learning processes and promoting these processes from his/her new perspective.

In this context, DICT are ways to contribute to the development of the work of EL teachers for them to promote and expand the learning of the language studied with students, but they do not replace the conventional or traditional models worked and that show results in the classroom. The fact is that, if the teacher has access to technological resources, he/she must appropriate both theoretical and practical knowledge to apply the digital tool that he/she believes to be viable and suitable for teaching some topic of the discipline he/she teaches. Thus, he/she will be able to “[...] notice improvements in class engagement, attention and discipline, in the interaction with teachers and among classmates and even in the absorption of content” (LORENZONI, 2016, p.7). In broad strokes, the teacher who joins the

digital universe, inserting the various DICT available to his/her didactic action, will be able to provide good experiences of knowledge construction in partnership with students.

**Active teaching methodologies:** The use of active teaching methodologies is not new in terms of pedagogical conception, considering that this paradigm has been serving as a counterpoint to traditional practices. Therefore, we must understand the importance of the methodology adopted by the teacher, since this is the engine that generates his/her decisions in the classroom and the structuring axis of his/her work. According to Bacich; Moran (2018, p. 4), methodologies are “great guidelines that orient the teaching and learning processes and are concretized in solid, specific and differentiated strategies, approaches and techniques.” Also in line with the conception of these authors, the active methodologies “comprise a conception of the teaching and learning process that considers the effective participation of students in the construction of their learning”, assuming that each student has a rhythm, motivation and style. (BACICH; MORAN, 2018, s/n). In other words, the teacher can have a variety of teaching methodologies or approaches to use in the classroom and, when planning and reflecting on his/her practice, he/she is able to make more conscious and convenient choices, according to the reality in which he/she is inserted. With regard to the use of active teaching methodologies, we realize that they can be enhanced by the use of digital technologies, and, many times, one is associated with the other without distinction. However, they are not interdependent, given that if a teacher uses digital technologies it does not necessarily imply that learning in his/her classroom is active and meaningful. In line with Bacich and Moran (2018, p. 4), it is worth clarifying that “active methodologies emphasize the student’s leading role, his/her direct, participative and reflective involvement in all stages of the process, experimenting, drawing, creating, under the guidance of the teacher.” In other words, the class is planned so that the student perceives himself/herself as an apprentice and develops his/her own potential. To illustrate the active methodologies, figure 1 shows a scheme of how the articulated process that involves its use occurs.



SCHOOL CULTURE  
 ROLE OF THE TEACHER  
 SPACE  
 MANAGEMENT  
 STUDENT AT THE CENTER  
 STUDENT'S AUTONOMY  
 EVALUATION  
 TECHNOLOGY  
 Source: Google Images (2021).

**Figure 1. Process that occurs through the use of active teaching methodologies**

As for meaningful learning, we ratify Barato’s conception (2012, p. 107), when he states that it occurs “[...] only when students transform available information into appropriate knowledge to the solution of a problem or creation of a new product”, that is, the knowledge and experience acquired in the classroom to solve a practical problem make sense for the student.

Thus, providing a space for active and meaningful learning is, according to Bacich and Moran (2018, p. 224):

[...] an exercise of autonomy; without the construction of autonomy, this type of learning cannot exist. From a personal perspective, an autonomous individual can identify interests and value them — create his/her own identity and also understand how to learn — with planning, focus, objectives /goals and evaluation (identification of possible difficulties), increasing his/her ability to structure himself/herself.

In times of pandemic, particularly in 2021, we realize that digital technologies are increasingly integrated into our lives and, consequently, into school as well. Therefore, the teacher is required to provide this integration between the students' reality and the classroom, reducing the barriers that separate and contribute to the students' demotivation and even school dropout. For this reason, it is necessary that teachers have didactic strategies related to the digital world, as is the case with WebQuests, to encourage students to get closer to the theme, task or content worked in the classroom.

**The Webquest Methodology: an inquiry-oriented activity on the Web**

In the digital age, one of the challenges that the educational field has experienced is to aggregate the various digital tools, such as *podcasts*, *Youtube*, *WhatsApp*, among others, to the active teaching methodologies, for example: the flipped classroom, the design thinking, the WebQuest methodology. According to Moran (2018 *apud* BACICH; MORAN, 2018, p. 4), active methodologies “are teaching strategies centered on the effective participation of students in the construction of the learning process, in a flexible, interconnected and hybrid way.” Among these possibilities of educational approaches through technological bias, WQM is presented as a didactic tool that contributes to stimulate students' feeling of integration, team spirit and search for knowledge through research to promote significant learning. The WebQuest methodology was first created and applied by Bernard Dodge in 1995. It prioritizes the use of the Internet for research practice, in which the teacher establishes a theme with clear objectives and tasks or challenges that can be performed. Students are led, in a guided way, to research through links on the theme, in order to solve the proposed tasks or challenges, because the main focus is the construction of knowledge, once, by the end of the execution of the WebQuest applied by the teacher, students present the results of their research through a product created by them. (DODGE, 1995). The term WebQuest is cited by Barato (2012) as a neologism in English that joined the term *Web* (world wide web) to the word *quest*, which means research, search, with the sense of adventure.

Based on Dodge's contributions, Bottentuit Junior (2009) considers that WebQuests should be challenging and bring good research websites to make students think and not just reproduce ideas, present an organization of activities, as well as materials to be consulted and produced by them, attract their attention with interesting tasks that are different from the usual pattern of activities and present them with quantitative and qualitative evaluation criteria. In general, there are two types of WQ: short-term and long-term. According to Dodge's orientation (1995), the objective of a short-term WQ, which can be performed in one or three classes, is the instructional goal of acquiring and integrating knowledge. At the end of its execution, the intention is that the student has had access to a significant number of information, making it have a sense. The long-term WQ, which can last from one week to a month, comprises the expansion and improvement of knowledge. Upon completing a long-term WQ, the student will have analyzed the proposed knowledge in more detailed way, transforming it and demonstrating an understanding of what was requested, since he/she will have to create a final product from the research he/she carried out. The structuring elements of a WQ, along the lines of Dodge's original proposal (1995), are six. However, the most recent format of the components of the original version of the WQ is presented by the following components: Introduction; Task;

Process, which indicates Resources; Evaluation; Conclusion; Credits and References. (DODGE, 2001).

Briefly, we relate some explanations about the components of the WQM, in the light of some scholars of this subject, such as Dodge (1995; 1997; 2002), Bottentuit Junior and Coutinho (2012), Barato(2012), Capella (2012) and Silva (2015). For the purpose of elucidating this point, we will explain each structuring element and its main characteristics on the table below.

**Table 1. Components of a WQ and main characteristics**

Introduction	It is the preliminary item in which there is the discovery and presentation of the topic to be addressed, which sets the scenario for the actions expected from students. It is written in a concise, attractive, motivating way that stimulates the students' curiosity to enter the adventure.
Task	It is the heart of the WQ; it points out an objective and focus for the students to perform; suggests the creation of an event or product with authenticity, considering that the ideal is that the WQ provides conditions to promote the transformation of the researched information into a new knowledge and is not just a simple collection of information. The teacher should take into account the age group of the students and, if possible, a combination of varied tasks.
Process/ Resources	Provides and describes the step by step that students must follow to perform the task, with links and/or research sources previously analyzed and selected by the teacher; requires clear, well-structured instructions consistent with students' cognitive needs; prioritizes group work, in which team members will assume various responsibilities regarding the work; it is the compass of the students in their searches: guides and optimizes their time with meaningful researches that contribute to the accomplishment of the tasks. The resources are used to provide information to students so that they can solve the tasks of the WQ and present them on websites and/or printed materials.
Evaluation	Provides explanation to the students, especially as a team, the performance levels they must achieve, such as: the evaluation criteria adopted by the teacher, preferably qualitative and quantitative, which type(s) - individual, collective or both, and the weight for each evaluation item. All of these evaluation criteria converge to the quality of the product created by the teams and the search of an authentic evaluation <sup>6</sup> .
Conclusion	The aspects approached in the Introduction of the WQ are resumed and encourage students/teams to continue researching and improving their knowledge or to use them in other adventures. It can indicate the dissemination of the final product of the WQ among peers, at school or even outside it.
Credits and references	Registration of the people who contributed to the creation of the WQ and the sources of information. It is recommended that the WQ is converted into a Web format, as well as placed on a visible, known and public website so that other teachers can get to know the work.

Source: Dodge (1995; 1997; 2002); Barato (2012); Bottentuit Junior and Coutinho (2012); Capella (2012); Silva (2015).

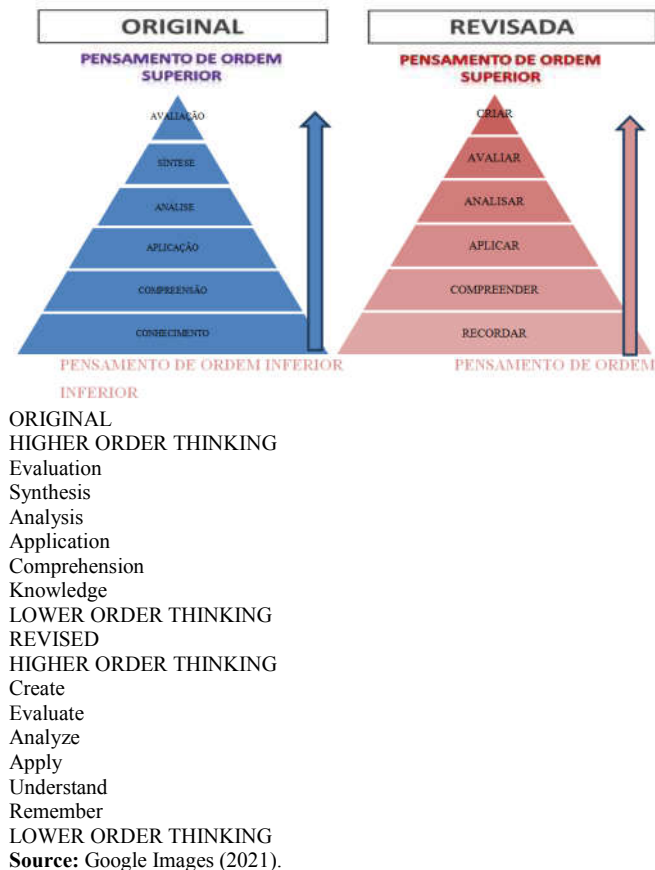
If the teacher creates and applies the WQM according to the theoretical assumptions focused by Dodge, in addition to creating an authentic WebQuest, he/she can encourage the students' interaction and participation throughout the process of applying this teaching tool. The task is considered the most important element of the WQM structure. In this sense, we register that it is based on the active Learning Taxonomy suggested by Bloom *et al.* (1956), which classifies and orders students' learning in levels or subareas, whose domains are classified into cognitive, affective and psychomotor. In this sense, the highest levels of cognitive domain, presented in

<sup>6</sup>In the context of a WQ, the evaluation is authentic when the teacher directly examines the performance(s) of students or teams through intellectual tasks, the ability to produce answers based on good arguments, complete tasks or when producing the products. (BARATO, 2012).



Bloom's Taxonomy, are: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. (BLOOM *et al.*, 1956; BOTTENTUIT JUNIOR, 2010; BOTTENTUIT JUNIOR; COUTINHO, 2012). Bloom's Taxonomy was adapted by Dodge (2002) with regard to its nomenclature, since he created the neologism "Taskonomy" to refer to the structuring element Task.

For a better understanding, we present, below, the figure of Bloom's Taxonomy<sup>7</sup> in its original and updated version. Let's see:



**Figure 2. Bloom's taxonomy according to the cognitive domain**

Like any methodology, WQM demonstrates positive and negative aspects. Among its advantages, we highlight the leading role of students, the possibility of reaching higher levels of learning and the engagement of students/teams in collaborative work, in which they exercise commitment and autonomy. According to Silva (2008), another benefit of WQ is its visibility, once it is published on the Internet, it can have an unlimited reach by users from any part of the world. Another important point in this teaching system is the professional development of the teacher and his/her role as an advisor/mediator for his/her students. A study by Anjos and Mercado reports an experience with 9th grade students in mathematics through technological innovations. The authors emphasize that:

The WQM encourages the teacher to be creative, to be the author of the work and that will motivate him/herto apply this teaching technique and its dissemination, as the authorship is synonymous with personal aggrandizement. It is a methodology that has visually striking feature because, as it is an internet page, it will arise students' curiosity, transforming the class into a process of knowledge construction for meeting constructivist principles: the teacher is a mediator, the student builds his/her own knowledge, the objective is to question, find out, investigate. From there, the student generates new knowledge schemes. (ANJOS; MERCADO, 2018, p. 318).

Moreover, Cruz and Carvalho and Sampaio and Cruz *et al.* (2006; 2007 *apud* Bottentuit Junior, 2010) emphasize WQM provides

students' motivation, encourages them to explore a range of information sources on the Web, favors significant learning, among others.

Regarding the disadvantages, Bottentuit Junior (2010, p. 187) observes that, in order to elaborate and apply the WQM, some points are essential:

- The need for minimal technological skills on the part of students and teachers; [...]
- Sources/resources need to be selected very well, both at Quantitative and qualitative levels, otherwise, students are at risk of not fulfilling the task;
- Over time, sources/resources tend to go offline, making it impossible for many WebQuests to remain successful.

In addition to the aforementioned aspects, a limitation that may compromise the application of MWQ in the school context is the absence of the necessary equipment for its implementation. In that case, it would not be possible to use WQM. (SILVA, 2008). We add that when planning the WQ, the teacher should care about some aspects, such as: the balance of the cognitive level; the age of the students, and the groups' linguistic knowledge stage, otherwise, any lack of attention may result a demotivating factor. Thus, from the readings on the WQM, we verified that when it is elaborated and applied following the basic guidelines proposed by its creator, Bernard Dodge, it can provide good didactic-pedagogical experiences in teaching practice.

**The use of the Web quest Methodology for the English Language teaching:** We consider that the work of applying the WQM aimed at the ELteaching has its relevance, once it dialogues with some premises of the work of the EL teacher. In communicative terms, one of the assumptions of the English class is that there is an active interaction and participation of the students, since it demands that the teacher work in an integrated way with the students and that they feel co-responsible for the resolution of the requested activities or tasks.

We agree with Almeida Filho (2013, p. 76) when he reports that:

[...] the communicative teaching of a foreign language is one that organizes the experiences of learning in terms of activities/tasks of real interest and/or student's need for him/her to be able to use the target language to perform real actions in the interaction with other speakers-users of that language.

Even so, we realize that the EL teachers who call themselves "communicative", when teaching, find a limiting and challenging reality, such as the linguistic heterogeneity of the students, the adopted textbook, among others. As Almeida Filho (2013, p. 83) also portrays this problem, "it is possible that the foreign language teacher is still stuck in a textbook that, basically, wants to prepare the student to manipulate forms of the target language through conscious study, automated production of patterns or both." Thus, WQM is configured as a viable alignment between the theoretical assumptions of communicative language teaching and active methodologies, since both take into account the unique characteristics of students and prioritize social interaction. In this perspective, the EL teacher can use the WQM to contribute to the language teaching and "[...] effectively, use the language in diverse communication experiences." (PAIVA, 2015, p. 10). Furthermore, if the EL teacher does not pay attention to the basic criteria of building a WQ, he/she may make the mistake of presenting only task proposals similar to a mere slide show, in which he/she reinforces the speech of a percentage of students who say they are unmotivated to learn EL, since they do not feel they are active members in the learning environment. As an example, in the academic context at the graduation level, we mentioned data from a brief survey on a search portal for scientific productions on the WebQuest Methodology carried out in January 2021. We used the platform of the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD), from the Brazilian Institute of Information in Science and Technology (IBICT) and verified that 95 studies were

<sup>7</sup>Bloom's Taxonomy in an updated version of 2001.

produced by students from Brazilian universities on this theme. In addition to term WebQuest, when the filter is changed to the keyword “English language” concomitantly, we perceived that this number decreases to just 7 scientific studies produced in the country. (IBICT, 2021). Being that, according to the IBICT (2021), almost all works came from Master’s degree programs; only one work was a Doctoral thesis. All of them were published between 2012 and 2020. Therefore, these data reveal a gap in terms of scientific research in Brazil with regard to active methodologies, especially to WQM. Therefore, we verified that the English Language area associated with the WebQuest methodology still requires further research, opening up a possibility for future investigations.

### Final Considerations

This study presented reflections made in the research entitled “English language teaching and the WebQuest methodology: a possibility for inquiry-oriented activities on the Web”, and aimed at reflecting and raising methodological possibilities in English classes, considering mainly the expansion of technology-mediated teaching in the current context of a pandemic around the world. In this sense, we were able to raise some data that suggested the insufficiency of scientific research aligning WQM with EL teaching of at the graduation level in Brazil. Therefore, this research aims at contributing to the scientific field, supplying, even partially, this demand. We noted that, in many points, WQM meets the communicative approach of English teaching, regarding its precepts and some methodological conceptions, mainly with regard to the protagonist role of the students in learning, the crucial question of interaction and the opportunity to develop their creative potential throughout the pedagogical action. In addition to its advantages, we made a counterpoint and also took into account some limitations in the use of WQM, such as the need for the availability of technological equipment for its application, the adequate selection of resources and the minimum technological dexterity on the part of students and teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to seek the suitable appropriation of these new methodologies, mainly WQM, and reinvent, especially at this time, when the use of digital resources is urgent. From the discussions outlined in this investigation, we can also infer that the research carried out here points to a path in which, although the methodology now analyzed takes the student to be the center of the classes, the role of the EL teacher during school planning is essential. He/She must establish his/her methodological choices with care and consistent pedagogical intent, according to the reality in which he/she finds himself/herself, considering some obstacles, such as: the compulsory use of textbooks by schools, the time available for planning and executing the WQM, as well as the students’ linguistic heterogeneity. Thus, the application of the WebQuest methodology is configured as an active and significant possibility in English language teaching electively and can bring benefits when well elaborated and applied.

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