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Global simulations in business french teaching and learning

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Abstract

Originally designed for the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL), global simulations have been rapidly adopted by teachers of French as a Second Language (FSL), French as a Mother Tongue (FMT) and French for Specific Purposes (FSP). This approach can be successfully used with learners of all age groups, from the beginner to the advanced level. In this paper we will present several thematic places and the way in which the global simulations approach can be used in teaching Master's students from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration within “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi.

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1. General aspects

„A global simulation is a script or a scenario framework which allows a group of learners [...] to create a universe of reference [...], to animate it with characters interacting with each other and to simulate language functions, which are needed within this framework, which is at the same time a thematic place and a universe of communication.” (Debyser, 1996). It is a teaching-learning method which intends to become “a means of correlating all pre-existing creative activities so that they avoid being a pedagogical index catalogue” (Yaiche, 1996: 12). The method is a further development of the theses of the specialists in language didactics and research of BELC and of its director, Francis Debyser who announced the “death of the textbook” and emphasized the need to be exposed to a communicative environment and to find oneself in a communicative situation as such in order to be able to learn a foreign language. “To educate means to generate changes in a child's behavior” (Osterrieth, apud Minder, 1999).

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The new behavior is materialized in *achievements*, in new and visible actions and in new representations, concepts, of the learner. This new behavior has a *noticeable aspect* as, for example, a newly acquired word, and a *mental aspect*, like a new linguistic concept or a new geometrical strategy. Thus, (Minder, 1999) education should be adapted to the initial material and to the final objective and especially, it should allow a progressive path between them. It is an issue of the necessity of transforming something, but also an issue of what one intends to obtain, of the kind of specialist one intends to train. Therefore, the teacher becomes (Minder, 1999) an organizer and a supervisor of the transformation process. Originally designed for the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL), global simulations have been rapidly adopted by teachers of French as a Second Language (FSL), French as a Mother Tongue (FMT) and French for Specific Purposes (FSP).

2. Purpose of study

The aim of this study consist in presenting the way in which the global simulations as method approach can be used in teaching Master's students from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration within „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi to acquire business vocabulary by proving their knowledge and know-how in real situations.

3. Research methodology

First of all, students acquire business vocabulary from Economics and Business textbooks in French which update knowledge they already have from their Economics and Business lectures in Romanian and then they study French communicative methods. Afterwards, Business students must prove their knowledge and know-how in real situations. Although they may have internship experience in Romanian business organizations, they may be unaware of whether they can cope with the demands of an international professional environment, in this case a Francophone one. The global simulations approach allows the teacher of Business French to immerse his/ her students in a certain space and environment in which they can assume a certain identity in order to prove that they are able to react according to what they learned in the training sessions, lectures, readings, role-plays of their language class. Adult learners are not easily motivated to take the role of customers, salespeople, negotiators or managers who speak a foreign language and belong to a different culture than their own. Therefore, the Business French teacher must invent thematic places (“lieux-thèmes”) that facilitate students’ simulations. Everybody practices global simulations even without being aware of the method. When we have a certain problem, we investigate the depth of the issue to diagnose the situation and find remedies, which implies finding the people, ideas or changes that could lead to the problem’s final resolution. We later imagine our way of acting in those circumstances as well as other people’s response. Therefore, we make a projection of ourselves in the future and we create a new environment in which we, others and even the situation itself have changed. *Global simulations* may be used in two different teaching-learning instances (Yaiche, 1996: 11): 1. linguistic training in French as a foreign language and in French as a mother tongue and 2. training in human relations, as it stimulates group work abilities, decision making skills and creativity. Initially, only adult trainees could experience the simulation game (Yaiche, 1996: 13). Students were supposed to first become employed before participating. This involvement in work situations was only necessary because global simulations require, first of all, good command of the language in making conversation, as well as the ability to get in touch with a certain reality, or knowledge of certain reference markers which help a person to place himself/herself within various spatial, temporal, social, intercultural, etc., frameworks. Global simulations imply the invention of a thematic place and of fictitious identities. Designing a thematic place means building, reinventing or imagining a background, an island, a building, a company, a village or a city, a neighborhood, a conference venue, it means constructing all the details and then immersing oneself in that space. Yet, one cannot face the new environment using one’s real identity. Participants, therefore, have to invent fictitious identities for themselves. It is not simply about acting in a role, it is rather about assuming that role (Fréchet, 1997: 37-38). We are not ourselves anymore when we assume the role of a professional in a certain field, of a family member, of a friend, of a colleague, of a buyer or a seller, of a patient or a doctor. We can easily play these roles one by one, even if we have to change our gestures, our mimicry, and especially our way of talking and of looking at others, our general behaviour and even our clothes and, in case this is impossible, our attitude at least. Thus, in the same place, wearing

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