

Chapter 2 Global Simulation Projects in Language Teaching

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2.0 Introduction

In this chapter we will first explain the idea of global simulations, then describe how they can successfully be used in teaching and finally how they can be created.

2.1 What is a global simulation?

Debyser defines a “*global simulation*” as follows:

Une simulation globale est un protocole ou un scénario cadre qui permet à un groupe d'apprenants pouvant aller jusqu'à une classe entière d'une trentaine d'élèves, de créer un univers de référence – un immeuble, un village, une île, un cirque, un hôtel – de l'animer de personnages en interaction et d'y simuler toutes les fonctions du langage que ce cadre, qui est à la fois un lieu-thème et un univers du discours, est susceptible de requérir.

(Debyser 1996: IV)

English translation:

A global simulation is a script or a scenario framework which allows a group of learners, up to a whole class of about 30 students, to create a universe of reference – an apartment block, a village, an island, a circus, a hotel, 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.

In a global simulation, the class creates a fictitious world that is slowly filled with life. The learners are given a specific framework. This can take the form of an apartment block, a village, a street, a hotel, as mentioned above, but it can also be a company or a conference. In the case of the EXPLICS Project the learners are invited to simulate e.g. a French village (French global simulation “Loupignac – un village à vivre”⁴), a carnival (Portuguese global simulation “Carnaval de Ovar”⁵), a boattrip from Sweden to Finland (Swedish global simulation “Silja Line – En båtresa från Stockholm till Helsingfors”⁶) or an NGO in Latin-America (Spanish global simulation “Una ONG en Latinoamérica”⁷).

The learners then have to describe this fictitious world and invent the people living and acting within this framework. The teacher gives them specific tasks and asks them to simulate role-plays, produce documents required within the simulated context, or describe events. The teacher can combine these tasks with specific linguistic activities, e.g. use of past tenses to describe what happened (e.g. a murder), use of question types (e.g. a policeman asking the people in the house whether they saw anything that happened), use of reported speech (e.g. the

⁴ URL: <http://www.zess.uni-goettingen.de/explics/france/>.

⁵ URL: <http://www.zess.uni-goettingen.de/explics/carnaval/>.

⁶ URL: <http://www.zess.uni-goettingen.de/explics/Schweden/index.html>.

⁷ URL: <http://www.zess.uni-goettingen.de/explics/spanish/Index.html>.

policeman writing it down in his report), or use of the imperative form (e.g. recipes, instructions). Authentic material is used both for reference and as models of particular text types and genres. In reading this authentic material our aim is not to answer questions about its content but rather to understand the meaning and be able to produce a similar document, but adapted to the new situation.

The fictitious world created by the learners is, strictly speaking, not authentic, since it is imaginary. Indeed, one might ask what difference there is between a global simulation and an ordinary role play activity. The main difference is that in time the fictitious world created in a global simulation becomes more and more real, moving away from the “illusion of the real” and leading to the “reality of the illusion” (Yaiche 1996: 13):

Comme Alan Maley, du British Council, qui s'intéresse, lui, à l'utilisation du *role-playing* dans l'enseignement de l'anglais langue étrangère, il [Debyser] préfère alors répondre à « l'illusion du réel » par « la réalité de l'illusion » et recourir à la fiction, plus réelle en fin de compte que les caricatures réductionnistes, voire hyper-réalistes des méthodes. Il est vrai que, depuis longtemps, les didactiques des langues sont confrontées au problème du réel qu'elles essaient d'intégrer dans le monde clos de la classe, sans pour autant jamais recourir aux techniques de la simulation. (Yaiche 1996: 13)

English translation:

Whereas Alan Maley, from the British Council, is mainly interested in the use of role-playing in teaching English as a foreign language, he [Debyser] prefers “the reality of the illusion” to “the illusion of the real”, and the use of fiction, more ‘real’ than the reduced, even hyper-realistic pretences of the manuals. It is true that, for a long time, methodologies of language teaching have been confronted with the problem of reality which they try to integrate into the closed world of the classroom without, however, using simulation techniques.

2.2 How to use global simulations in class?

A global simulation can be the framework of a whole course. In this case, the teacher will prepare a list of situations of communication (which will correspond to the vocabulary to be covered) and a list of grammatical aspects he or she wants to cover in class. He or she will then identify certain situations with specific grammatical aspects and from there develop a course curriculum with a logical situational and grammatical progression. The next step is to prepare tasks for each situation.

At lower levels the teacher can ask the learners to describe the place (in the case of an apartment block they will describe the building as a whole, the neighbourhood and then the individual apartments), then ask them to invent and to describe the people living in the building. Instead of describing themselves (with the risk of perpetuating certain mistakes) they are asked to transfer the competence to different situations. In order to teach the imperative form the teacher may ask the learners to draft rules for the house or to invent a recipe book for the house. For teaching or revising question types he or she may ask them to invent a crime, then ask them to simulate the arrival of a policeman who investigates the case. When the policeman writes his report he will use reported speech. Annex 1 shows examples of how certain situations can be linked to specific situations of communication and grammatical phenomena.

When dealing with absolute beginners, the teacher explains the grammar before asking the learners to use it in a concrete situation as mentioned above. At higher

levels he or she can ask the learners to draft their responses, then analyse the problematic areas and finally discuss them with the group again. At a later stage the teacher will give the learner another task where the specific linguistic phenomenon is needed in order to see whether the learners have internalised the vocabulary or grammar. By using a global simulation, linguistic phenomena are used in a wide variety of situations that are not limited to the textbook or the personal situation of the learner. This does not often happen in traditional language courses, where students are not taught to transfer competencies acquired to different, although similar situations.

During the course the teacher can vary the activities according to the learners' needs, and ask the learners:

- to simulate dialogues or situations involving a larger group of people (which may be recorded for feedback purposes or collected in written form),
- to invent stories which they will present orally and in written form,
- to prepare texts in relation to the fictitious world (e.g. company regulations).

Students acting as editors collect all the texts to be edited and published in a course brochure, in a booklet or on a website, once they have been corrected. This final product will be given to each participant, as a kind of souvenir and to motivate them to continue learning the language.

In fact, doing a global simulation in class means that the teacher starts the class by providing a framework and tasks for the learner. He or she will not arrive with a textbook or a pile of photocopies, although the learners will often need authentic models to manage a task. The text is no longer the input, but is the result of the course. Working with global simulations means adopting an output-oriented approach in teaching, which focuses on productive as well as receptive activities.

Global simulations can also be integrated into a traditional course, where the content and grammatical progress is taught by using a textbook. The teacher can then give the learners tasks referring to the topics and aspects covered in the textbook, i.e. ask them to invent a dialogue on the topic from the textbook, but transferred to the global simulation. If no textbook is used, the teacher can teach grammar and vocabulary in the traditional way and then invite the learners to simulate or invent similar situations or texts for the global simulation framework.

Languages for specific purposes

Global simulations are particularly suitable for LSP courses ("Languages for Specific Purposes"): having listed the topics to be covered during the course, the teacher can collect relevant material and develop tasks to give to the learners. If he/she teaches an LAP class ("Languages for Academic Purposes") he/she may use the simulation of an international conference as a structure for the course, and then ask the learners to agree on a conference topic. Some authentic tasks would include designing an agenda, producing a conference announcement, a poster or a flyer and designing a conference website. Students could prepare written abstracts, and go on to simulate the conference and collaborate on the minutes. In the same way, the invention and simulation of a fictitious company or the development of a business plan for a

fictitious company can also serve as a model for a global simulation in a business language course.

There are examples of this approach among the products developed by the EXPLICS team: the German global simulation “Dorferneuerung”⁸ deals with the problem of regional planning and development and suits the needs of students studying this subject. The simulation of a French vineyard (“Au château Dorothee”⁹) can be used both for general language teaching and learning and more specifically for students of agriculture or viticulture.

The new role of the teacher and the learners

When using a global simulation in class the role of the teacher is to explain the tasks and to make sure that the learners proceed with the invented story throughout the course and cover the linguistic phenomena of the syllabus in a logical order. In the production phase, the teacher acts as facilitator, moving among the individual groups and helping them when they encounter problems. Authentic texts may function as models. During presentations or oral tasks the teacher can note errors and weaknesses in preparation for feedback. The feedback session may also include a self-assessment and peer assessment phase. Global simulations are not teacher-centred. When using a global simulation the teacher takes a less dominant position, concentrating on evaluation and assessment. The responsibility for the learning, the products and the content progress of the simulation, is transferred to the learners, who become more autonomous in their learning.

2.3 Why use global simulations in teaching?

Using global simulations in class means following a holistic approach to language teaching, as grammar and vocabulary, and reading, writing, listening and speaking skills are not considered separately but required by the task. In order to complete the task e.g. the simulation of a discussion between two or more persons or the development of a poster they will need to analyse models first and acquire receptive skills as well. Vocabulary is not taught independently, but discovered when analysing spoken and written models and drafting their own work. They will also revise grammatical aspects when writing their texts or preparing role-plays or presentations.

In this way, the learners do not simply repeat dialogues from the textbook but learn how to react to the unexpected as their story progresses and how to overcome problematic linguistic situations. They will therefore acquire language learning strategies in a fairly authentic situation. The simulations take students and teachers beyond gap-fill or transformation exercises and dialogues more or less learnt by heart, and help learners to communicate, to react to somebody speaking with them and to express their own ideas.

This holistic approach, with its strong emphasis on productive tasks, can simulate authentic situations effectively and give the learners more and more confidence in their speaking and writing. This will help them to improve their language competence significantly and stimulate them to use the language and to continue learning it.

⁸ URL: <http://www.zess.uni-goettingen.de/explics/Dorferneuerung/>.

⁹ URL: http://www.zess.uni-goettingen.de/explics/chateau_dorothee/index.html.

The considerable advantage for the teacher is that he or she can concentrate on providing support material and help, giving feedback and correction where needed. This allows the student, especially adults, to continue the learning process more independently. The initial extra work originating from the restructuring of the course and the development of new teaching material is compensated for by improvements in student motivation and classroom management as group work can be effectively introduced.

2.4 How to develop a global simulation?

When developing a global simulation the teacher has to think about a suitable framework that corresponds to the aims and objectives of the language course and to the needs of the learners. For LSP purposes the framework will correspond to a location or situation the learners might encounter in their future professional life, e.g. a company (for business language courses), a legal issue (for students of law) or a farm (for students of agriculture); for LAP courses, the simulation could be of a study abroad situation, or an international conference. This framework forms the basis of the task, e.g. the simulation of an international conference, the simulation of a study-abroad programme, or the development of a business plan for a fictitious company.

The teacher gives the learners a template e.g. of the location to invent, which they have to fill in, or gives them key facts about the framework (e.g. number of people, conference participants or employees), or ask them to make their own decisions about the content.

In the next step the teacher will ask the learners to fix the key figures and facts for their simulation project, which will later slowly be filled with life. In order to do so he or she will develop a series of build-up tasks: After considering the learners' linguistic and communicative needs the teacher will think of situations and linguistic products where specific phrases, expressions, words, grammatical phenomena or specific content are needed, and will prepare a series of models and activities which will present and practise these. Particular attention needs to be paid to the structure of the simulation and final product. This is dependent on the build-up tasks and intermediate products, the starting activities, which guarantee that the learners get attracted by the global simulation, and the final, concluding activity. In a classroom situation the teacher may adapt and change the build-up tasks in the course of teaching a specific group in order to adapt the activities to the learners' needs. However, he or she should make sure that these changes do not put at risk the final outcomes and final product of the global simulation as all the activities should always be focused towards this final product.

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