

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 152 (2014) 214 – 218

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

ERPA 2014

“E-shop”: a collaborative learning activity

Mohammed Bellal^{a*}, Fahima Nader^a^a*Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Informatique, ESI, Algiers, 16309, Algeria*

Abstract

This paper deals with instructional design in a university context. It is a part of a project called “e-LATE” (e-Learning Activities for Technical English). These activities are designed as units of study for students in computer science in Algeria. “e-Shop” is designed using communicative language learning and collaborative learning approaches. Both obey to Piaget’s cognitive theory & Vygotsky social constructivism. The scenario is built on role play as a learning situation. In «e-Shop», students play different roles: vendors, clients, and dealers - in a computer shop. The game may be run both in a face to face or distance mode. In recent years, language acquisition is focused on the learning process rather than language teaching. What is targeted is not only the learner’s linguistic competence but the development of his communicative ability as well (Krish, 2001). Another approach, that practitioners use, is the collaborative approach as it increases the learners’ motivation (The Collaborative Learning Project). We designed an instructional activity named «e-Shop» that uses firstly, the communicative approach to enable learners get better language skills, then role-playing, as a learning situation, because it uses different communicative techniques and develops fluency in the language, promotes interaction in the classroom and increases motivation (Krish, 2001); finally collaborative work so as to run those approaches among peers. This latter implies a cognitive conflict between/among peers that calls for a debate on a given subject and therefore let students communicate and show/express their opinions.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the ERPA Congress 2014.

Keywords: communicative approach; role playing; collaborative work; instructional design; learning activity; distance learning.

1. Introduction

Since the advent of the Web and the Internet, many English courses have become available online. The plethora of educational websites offer pages of grammar and teaching skills, often accompanied by numerous exercises and

* Corresponding author Tel.: +213.771.677.802.

E-mail address: m_bellal@esi.dz

generally obeying the Skinnerian vision of education (Behaviorism). Today, with the generalized use of the ICT, teachers, educationalists and computer scientists adopt a new vision of education: learning made possible through communicative methods and instructional design. This paper deals with instructional design in a university context. It is a part of a project called “e-L8” (“e-LATE” stands for E-Learning Activities for Technical English) (Bellal, 2008). It is a repository of learning activities that contains three activities: “e-shop”, “e-workshop” and “e-deal”. These activities would make the content of an English course for students in computer science, at a university level, in Algeria, where, English is a second foreign language, after French. “e-Shop” is – as mentioned above – a part of a project called “e-L8”. This paper contains a section on learning situations; these are considered necessary for instructional design and as a tool that makes learners become actors of their own learning. We focus, in this paper, on the learning situation called the role playing. We give a definition of it, its origin and objectives. A third section deals with collaborative learning and the impact it has on learners. The next section is about communicative language learning. The activity “e-SHOP” is described in section five. There we talk about the scenario: the actors in the activity, the goals to achieve through it and the learners’ evaluation at the end of the activity. A conclusion ends this paper, suggesting some perspectives and future work.

2. The learning situations

“The main task of a teacher is to compose a learning situation which would remove the difficulties experienced by learners. The teacher’s work is to design a scenario that describes the context for knowledge mobilization. This would lead to learners’ reconstruction of representations of a notion or concept” (Faerber, 2004).

1.1. The role play: a definition

“Role playing”, as defined by (IPM06, 2006), “is an improvised scene between two or more members of a group. Improvisation is made from a theme (professional, social, family, present or future) broad enough to allow each character to play the role in his own way”. (IPM06, 2006) adds that “This active learning method has many formative virtues, because of the awareness it brings among participants and observers”. Role playing allows the changing attitudes of persons through awareness at the intellectual and emotional levels. It involves real attitudes and real human relationships, as expressed in situations experienced by participants (actors).

- In recent years, language teaching has focused on the learning process rather than the teaching of the language. The emphasis is not only on linguistic competence of the language learners but also on the development of their communicative ability (Krish, 2001).
- Role play in this distance learning class allows the objectives of the course to be met in the limited time, through an integrated approach which allows the practice of language skills, content and interaction skills and strategies.
- A role play is a highly flexible learning activity which has a wide scope for variation and imagination (Krish, 2001). According to (Ladousse, 1987), role play uses different communicative techniques and develops fluency in the language, promotes interaction in the classroom and increases motivation.

1.2. Origins of role play

Role play is derived from psychodrama, invented by Moreno around 1922. This doctor, psychiatrist and sociologist became aware of the liberating value of dramatic play for the actor. Role playing, in pedagogy, allows acquisition of “know-how”:

- It transforms the learning situation (the more active a learner becomes, the better communication is).
- It makes some disciplines more lively (foreign languages).
- It helps knowledge acquisition.

1.3. Objectives of role play

Role playing allows to:

- Live a situation to better analyze it in its complexity and in all its facets.
- Evaluate, adjust and open the range of social and professional roles, present in everyday life.
- The observation of the socio-cognitive conflict in what it brings in the process of meaning co-construction;
- Considering the individual management of social and communicative dimensions of situations experienced by individuals.

2. The collaborative learning

Collaborative learning is based on the view that knowledge is a social construct. Collaborative activities are most often based on four principles (Cornell University, 2008):

- The learner or student is the primary focus of instruction.
- Interaction and "doing" are of primary importance
- Working in groups is an important mode of learning.
- Structured approaches to developing solutions to real-world problems should be incorporated into learning.

Other principles may be added to the previous four to better coin the collaborative learning. These are:

- Collaborative learning (The Collaborative Learning Project, 2013) is considered a teaching style that has evolved over the last thirty years and that is still evolving.
- It, first, helps develop resources that empower learners by encouraging them to work with every other learner in the class in a playful, but purposeful, way.
- Then make complex ideas accessible by presenting them in concrete, visual and tactile ways.
- Finally encourage exploratory talk in the classroom.

3. The communicative language teaching

The communicative style of language teaching began in the 1970s and developed in response to a growing dissatisfaction with prevailing methodologies, and in recognition of theoretical advances. Since then, language acquisition is focused on the learning process rather than language teaching. What is targeted is not the learner's linguistic competence alone but also the development of his communicative ability [1]. At the more abstract end, there is general agreement that CLT involves an emphasis on communicating by means of the foreign language. At the practical classroom end, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is strongly associated with a number of particular activity types, such as role play, problem-solving and pair work (Thompson, G. 1996). The question of how learners learn the necessary grammar remains. This does not mean a simple return to a traditional treatment of grammar rules. The focus is now moving away from the teacher covering grammar to the learners discovering grammar (Cornell University, 2008).

4. "e-shop": the learning activity

4.1. Introducing "e-Shop"

"e-Shop" is an educational activity which aims at the appropriation of technical English vocabulary related to the field of computer engineering, i.e. that of the "technical" and "commercial" lexicon - necessary for any vendor of computer products (hardware and software), on the one hand; the appropriation of General English vocabulary, on the other hand. Besides, this implies situations of genuine communication, being part of the real world. The theoretical bases of the learning activity "e-Shop" are (i) a learning situation: "the role play"; (ii) learning theories: Piaget's and Vygotsky vision of learning: "(social) constructivism"; (iii) approaches such as "the communicative language learning approach" and "the collaborative learning". There are two ways of implementation. It can take place either in a classroom in a "face- to-face" mode or performed in a "chat room".

4.2. *The actors in the activity “e-SHOP”* (Bellal, 2008)

4.2.1. *The learners* (Bellal, 2008)

"E-Shop" is a scenario that puts players in different situations, as:

- vendors in computer stores (various microcomputers, software, spare parts and consumables)
- "expert customers" (tutors), looking for new computer products or interested in buying components;
- neophyte clients (learners) seeking information about available configurations, comparison between different products or advantages offered by the store (formulas credit- purchase/leasing) before buying;
- And dealers offering their products.

Some learners will play the role of "clients", wishing to acquire computer products (microcomputer, consumables, etc.); others that of "sellers" to inform customers about products quality or any other information necessary to meet the customer expectations and satisfy their curiosity. Note that the clients come from different professional categories and therefore with heterogeneous knowledge (many with little or no knowledge) on computer products for sale.

4.2.2. *The tutors* (Bellal, 2008)

In this activity, the tutor will be the "expert customer" in a face to face situation and the “moderator” in “chat sessions". His knowledge of computers and English, both general and technical, enable him to intervene in a debate where the language misuse happens (mispronunciation or grammar mistakes). “The tutor has specific knowledge (English) and technical (IT) that allow moderate discussions, take advantage of Internet resources and "know how to accompany the actors to missions where the values of sharing and mutual help will be performed as well as individual freedom and creativity” (Arnaud & Serdidi, 2001).

4.3. *The learning objectives of the activity “e-SHOP”* (Bellal, 2008)

This activity will allow students to use those vocabularies (in “chat sessions " or class sessions) and implement the learning situation called "role play." This will be done by six students enrolled in this session: two vendors, three clients and a supplier. This activity has as goals:

- Comprehension and oral production through language exchanges using:
- correct grammatical constructions (sentences, conjugation, etc.).
- Technical and commercial vocabulary for product technical characteristics and its features;
- General English Vocabulary on civility and other forms of authentic communication (daily language)
- Comprehension and Written Production

They enable learners to deal with correspondence from clients and vendors, on the one hand; and suppliers, on the other hand. Both learning skills (written production and comprehension) are implemented when reading correspondence and sending replies (reception and reading administrative mails), advising customers for new products acquisition (issuing purchase orders, warehouse management, etc.). Besides, this activity requires:

- Browsing the Internet for information retrieval and information collecting on new products and items to acquire for sale;
- The use of ICT (forum, e-mail and chat room), available in all educational devices.

Finally, this activity will evaluate learners on several levels and will focus on:

- Check the correct use of the general English (grammar and vocabulary in the customer welcoming, civility, and information for customers) as well as the technical language, both in written and oral skills, through both: oral production (help and advice to customers, welcoming), written production (technical and administrative correspondence, sending and receiving purchase orders)
- Track the learners' interventions (especially during chat sessions, "posts" in forums), and the "sent" directory (letters sent) for emails.

5. Conclusion

"e-Shop" implements the "role play" as a learning situation. This activity allows:

- The acquisition of the four learning skills in acquiring a second language, namely production and comprehension, both oral and written;
- The acquisition of an everyday vocabulary (general English) and technical lexicon (specific English);
- The use of communication means, both synchronous ("chat") and asynchronous modes ("forum", wikis and email).
- The use of learning outcomes in a quasi-real situation.

Our contribution is illustrated by instructional design, implementing different learning situations. We want, through this learning, show that the scenario should not be traditional. It must (i) allow sharing between different communities with similar goals, (ii) be interoperable for use on any course management system, (iii) be easily visible and identifiable by the use of metadata. To do so, we use instructional modeling languages, standards recommended by W3Consortium. The perspective offered to us is to complete this project by integrating computer engineers to transform them into dynamic web pages incorporating sound and video animation.

References

- Krish, P. (2001). A Role Play Activity with Distance Learners in an English Language Classroom. National University of Malaysia, Bangui, Malaysia. *The Internet TESL Journal*. Vol. VII, No. 7, July 2001.
- The Collaborative Learning Project*. (2013). www.collaborativelearning.org/ Last retrieved July 25th, 2013.
- Faerber, R. (2004) Characterization of learning situations in a learner's group. STICEF (Information and Communication Science and Technologies for Education and Training) [STICEF (Sciences et Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication pour l'Education et la Formation)] Volume 11, 2004.
- IPM06 (Institute of Pedagogy and Multimedia University). (2006). Memos of IPM. Memo N° 8. <https://www.uclouvain.be/97784.html> (accessed 21.10.13)
- Ladousse (1987) quoted by Dra. Wienny Ardriyati. (2009). Role play: One alternative and effective teaching method to improve students' communicative skill.2009. Pp. 221. www.eprints.unika.ac.id/11962/1/Wienny_Adriyati.pdf
- Thompson, G. (1996). Some misconceptions about communicative language teaching. *ELT Journal* Volume 50/1 January 1996, pp. 9 – 15. <http://www.cte.cornell.edu/teaching-ideas/engaging-students/collaborative-learning.html>
- Bellal, M. (2008). Vers un Scénario formel d'un cours d'anglais technique pour les étudiants en informatique: Utilisation de la spécification IMS-LD. Mémoire de magister, INI, 2008.
- Arnaud, M & Serdidi, M. (2001). Un rôle pédagogique pour les jeux de rôles. *L'Odysée des réseaux*. Cahiers pédagogiques n° 396.2001. http://www.cahiers-pedagogiques.com/article.php3?id_article=2735