

Process Drama in the Core French Classroom: Using Global Simulation

By Dr. Joseph Dicks and Dr. Barbara Le Blanc

Introduction

Recent studies of Core French at the secondary level in Canada indicate that there is a high level of student dissatisfaction and attrition and that language proficiency levels of Core French students are below the targeted outcome levels (APEF, 2002).

A module based on principles of drama for learning has been piloted in four Grade 9 and one grade 10 classes in two school districts in New Brunswick in an attempt to address these challenges. Teachers were implicated in the process of development and implementation of the pilot module from the beginning. Students were surveyed or interviewed before and after the implementation of the pilot module to determine changes in confidence, motivation, and self-assessment of language competency. Teachers were interviewed after the pilot to determine if they perceived changes in students regarding these factors, as well as their personal assessment of the drama for language learning approach.

Process Drama

The essence of process drama is that students are engaged in a cooperative activity wherein they create their own fictitious context, identities and scenarios. In this approach, performance for an external audience is not required but performance for an internal audience (the participants themselves) is essential. Process drama involves action, reaction and interaction to create a meaningful individual and group experience. The underlying principles of process drama are play and make believe, learning in context, ownership of learning, and use of symbols, signs and metaphors to communicate and interpret meaning.

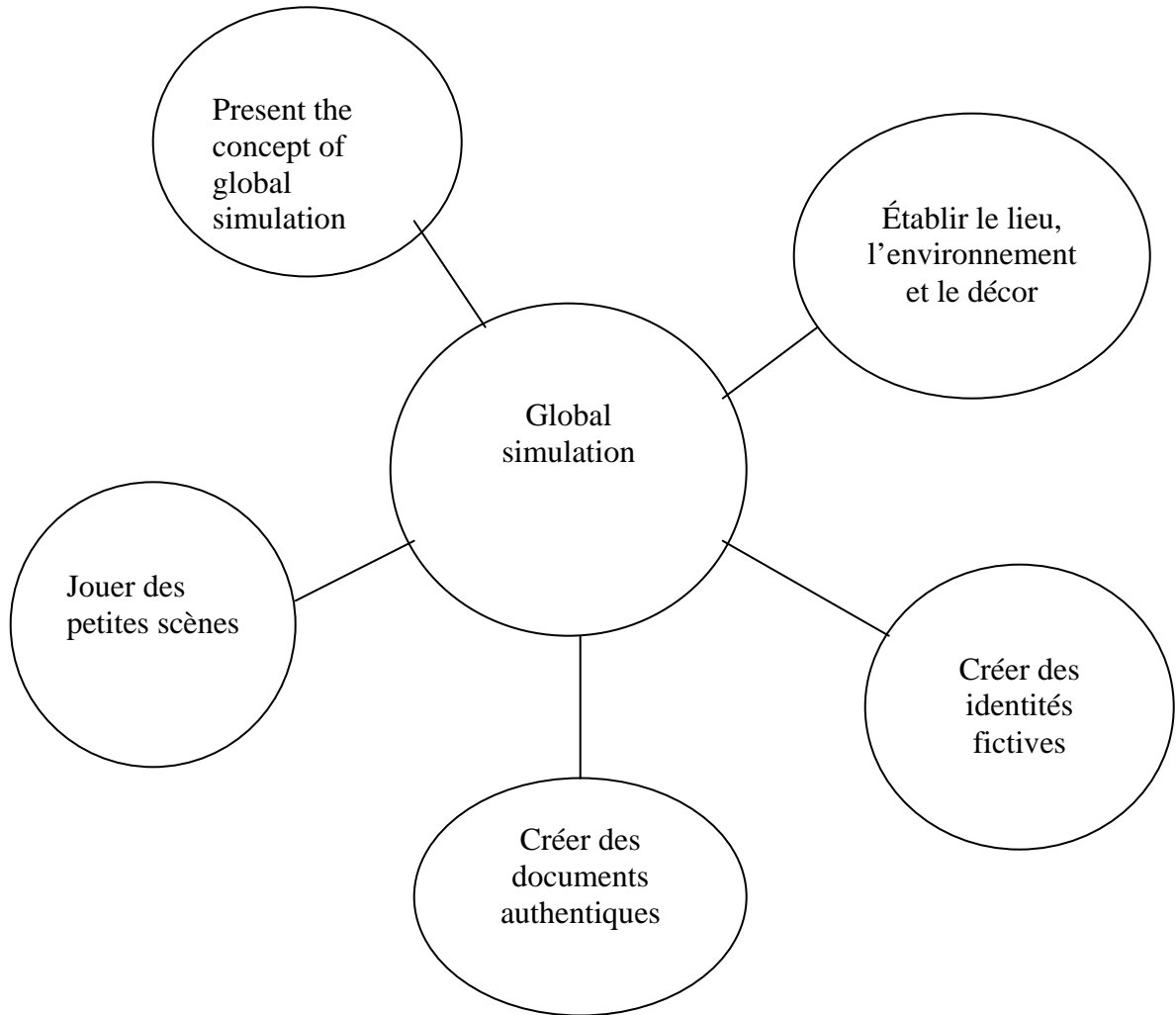
Process drama involves drama techniques that help students to communicate (verbally and non-verbally) more effectively, promotes personal and social development, provides the opportunity to work with cross-curricular themes and topics, and stimulates creativity. It is also intrinsically motivating.

One Kind of Process Drama: La simulation globale

In a *simulation globale* participants create a universe (e.g., a village, a hotel, an apartment building, a summer camp) where they make believe in order to create and bring to life various characters and events. The steps involved in a global are presented in Figure 1 and described in more detail in the section that follows Figure 1.

Figure 1

Global Simulation Steps



Steps

1. Present the concept of a global simulation and the process to the students

Explain to the students that they are going to do a different kind of project : a global simulation. Ask them if they have any experience in doing simulations. Explain that they will be creating a place (e.g., an airport, a summer camp, a shopping mall), that they will identify and describe people who live in that place, and that they will create activities and events that happen in that place. They will role-play situations that occur there and will film some of the role plays.

2. Identify a theme/context for the simulation.

Students then brainstorm various possibilities for the place and the teacher guides them, consulting curriculum documents and teaching resources for relevant themes and topics. In the pilot project teachers and students created a youth activity centre (*Le centre des jeunes*).

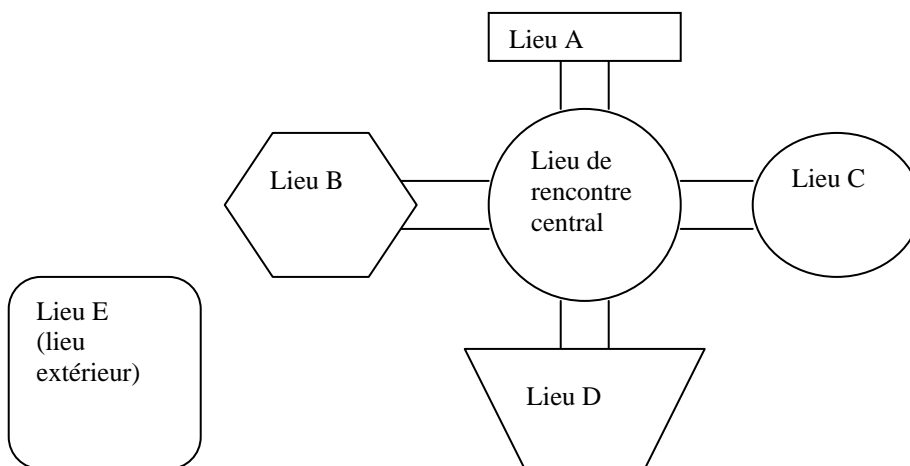
3. Identify and describe activities

The teacher leads the class in a brainstorming to identify possible activities. In the pilot, *Le centre des jeunes*, some activities identified were swimming, painting, video arcade, basketball, chess, and movies. In this context services offered in the Centre were also included: for example, restaurant, hair salon, library, job centre, health centre, driver education.

4. Design the physical space

Students then create a blueprint of the physical space. **Figure 2** is an example of a physical layout of the *Centre des jeunes* in the pilot,

Figure 2

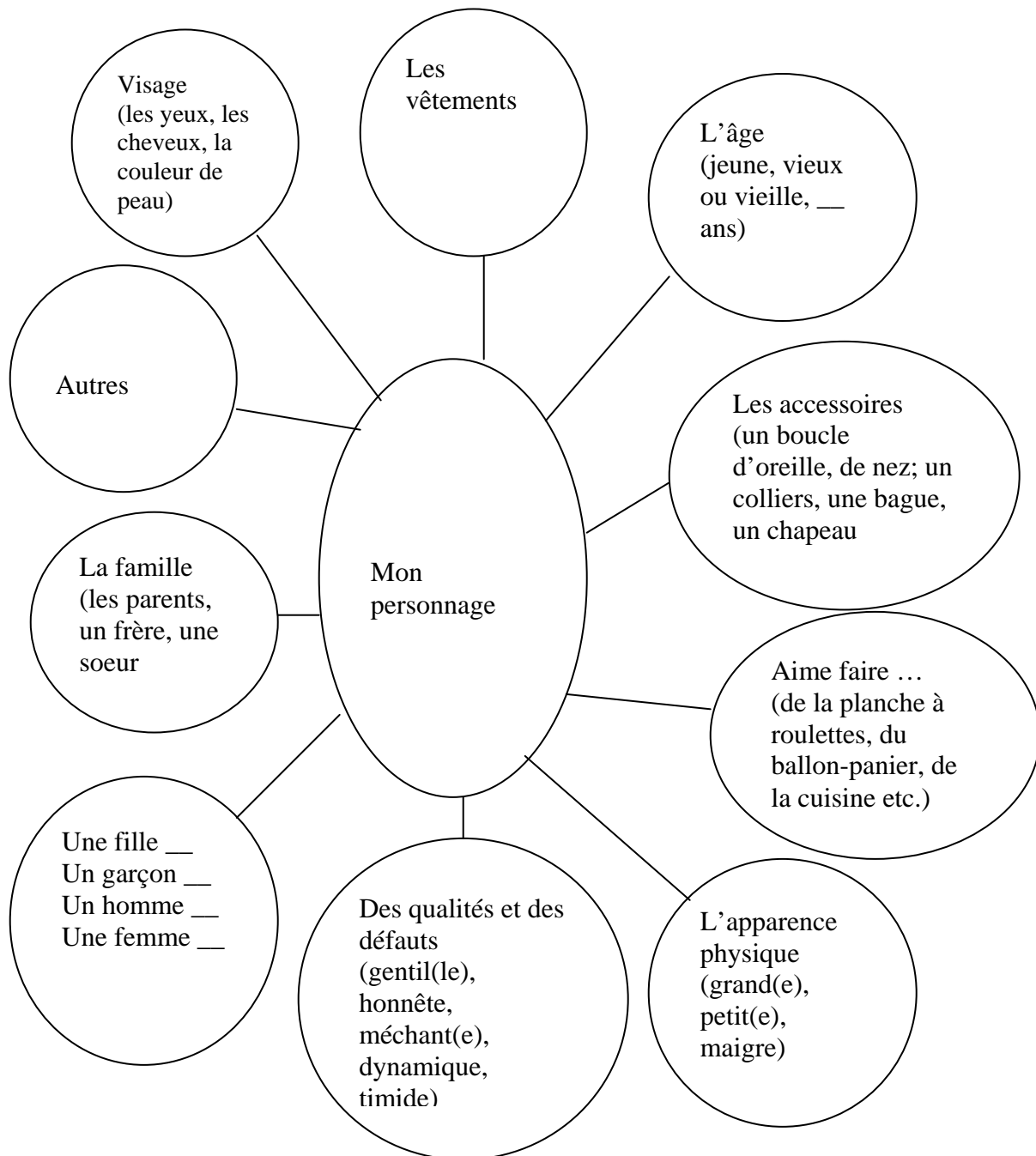


The entire simulation can take place in the classroom or other rooms in the school can be used (e.g., gymnasium, theatre, cafeteria, entrance ways). Students decide what the various rooms will be, where they will be located, and what services/activities will take place in those rooms.

4. Identify people and create identities

Each participant chooses a character and creates a portrait that includes both physical characteristics and personal likes, dislikes and disposition. The word-web provided in **Figure 3** can be used to assist students in the development of their portrait.

Figure 3



Here is an example of a portrait created in the pilot:

M. Boisvert (le bibliothécaire)

Monsieur Clarence Boisvert a de longs cheveux gris en queue-de-cheval. Il a environ 60 ans. Il est très sportif. L'année passée il a couru le marathon de Boston. Il porte des vêtements de sport et il a un petit diamant dans la narine gauche. Il mange très bien et pousse sa philosophie personnelle sur tout le monde. Dans sa bibliothèque, il y a beaucoup d'information sur la santé.

5. Create scenarios and dialogues

Participants create situations and dialogues. The following is an example of a scene and a dialogue used in the pilot:

The school cafeteria provides notoriously unhealthy food choices. M. Boisvert the librarian wants something healthy. Mme Groseiller, the chef, has a limited (unhealthy) menu.

M. Boisvert Bonjour Simone!

Mme Groseilliers Bonjour Clarence! Qu'est-ce que je peux t'offrir aujourd'hui?

M. Boisvert Qu'est-ce qu'il y a sur le menu?

Mme Groseilliers Tu travailles ici depuis 5 cinq ans. Tu sais que le menu est toujours le même.

M. Boisvert Ok, je veux une salade et de la soupe.

Mme Groseilliers Il n'y en a pas. Je peux t'offrir aujourd'hui des frites, des beignes, une poutine couverte de fromage et de sauce.

6. Use of signs and dramatic techniques in process drama

Participants use signs and drama to guide and focus attention on certain actions, people and objects.

Examples of signs:

costumes, objects, sounds, gestures and images

Examples of drama techniques (adapted from Neelands and Goode, 2000):

Choral Speak : a choral reading of a text using sound, song, repetition, emphasis, and a variety of voices.

Hotseating : interviewing or questioning of a character in role by other participants

Masks : use of various types of masks (full, half, character, anonymous) to change perspectives of situations and encounters.

Mimed Activity : use of movement, actions and physical responses rather than dialogue

Sound Tracking : use of realistic or stylised sounds to describe an environment, to create a mood or paint a picture.

Still Image : use of participants' bodies to crystallize a moment, idea or theme

Thought Tracking : freezing of the action to allow participants to talk out loud about their private inner thoughts

Teacher in Role : the taking on of a role by the teacher to excite interest, control the action, invite involvement, provoke tension, challenge superficial thinking, create choices and ambiguity, develop narrative, create possibilities for participants to interact.

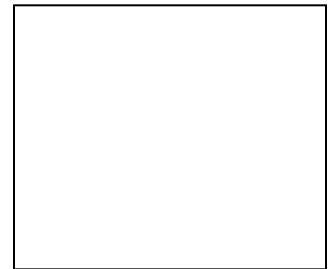
7. Film the role plays

The digital camera is a useful tool and serves as a source of motivation. Participants use a digital camera to record their role plays. The recorded performances are shown in class. They may be shared with other classes, or shown to parents if they so desired. The camera is not the focus -- the dramatic role plays are at the heart of the filming experience. Students practice their role plays often but film them only once. The following storyboard helps student to organise the filming of the scenes,

Le « Story-board »

Scène 1

Position de la caméra : _____
Qu'est-ce qui se passe ? _____
Qu'est-ce qu'on dit ? _____
Son/Effets : _____



Scène 2

Position de la caméra : _____
Qu'est-ce qui se passe ? _____
Qu'est-ce qu'on dit ? _____
Son/Effets : _____



Scène 3

Position de la caméra : _____
Qu'est-ce qui se passe ? _____
Qu'est-ce qu'on dit ? _____
Son/Effets : _____



Concluding Remarks

Preliminary results of this pilot project suggest that students are more motivated and have more confidence in their language ability when they are engaged in highly interactive, imaginative, language rich, and student-centered activities. The experience is more meaningful since students take control and responsibility for their own learning. However, we have piloted this module with a limited number of classes and need to expand the project to have a better sense of its impact and effectiveness. If you are interested in being involved, please visit UNB's Second Language Education Centre website (www.unb.ca/slec) to access the complete module, teaching guide and feedback form. We would appreciate hearing from you about your experience.

References

Bowell, Pamela & Brian S. Heap. (2001) *Planning Process Drama*. London : David Fulton Publishers.

Core French Survey: *A Regional Report* commissioned by the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 2002.

Getting to the Core: University Students Describe Their High School Core and Extended (Core) French Experiences, Canadian Parents for French, 2004

Neelands, Jonothan & Tony Goode *Structuring Drama Work : A Handbook of Available Forms in Theatre and Drama* Cambridge University Press, 2000.



Dr. Joseph Dicks is a professor in the Second Language Education Centre, Faculty of Education, University of New Brunswick. He works with pre-service and in-service teachers to improve the delivery of French second language programs.



Dr. Barbara Le Blanc is a professor in the Department of Education at Université Sainte-Anne in Nova Scotia. She is a specialist in drama, social studies and French culture.

Acknowledgments: The authors thank the Department of Canadian Heritage, the New Brunswick Department of Education, the School Districts involved, and, in particular, the supervisors, teachers and students who participated in the pilot project.

This Article was published in *Réflexions*, May 2006 - Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers