USING ROLE-PLAYING TECHNIQUES IN AN UNDERGRADUATE MARKET RESEARCH CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The methodologies presented in this paper have been put into practice throughout the 2016/2017 academic year of the Market Research, 3rd year of Degree in Tourism as Educational Innovation Project within the Novice Teacher Training Program conducted by Universitat Jaume I of Castellón (Spain).

From the previous experience teaching theoretical classes in the area of marketing and market research, the conclusion is drawn that by involving the students in the development of the class, the process of learning and understanding of the contents worked is improved, increasing the attention during the classes and the motivation on the matter treated. For this reason and with the intention of focusing efforts on facilitating student learning, the possibility of introducing elements that reduce linearity in theoretical classes of a more academic and abstract nature is proposed, in order to provide them with greater dynamism and, in turn, to bring concepts closer together To a more applied level, implying, at all times, the students in their development.

The main objective of this project is to obtain a better performance and learning result of the theoretical classes and also a better absorption of the contents by the students. To this end, in the development of each of the thematic blocks, a role-playing activity has been selected as a complementary teaching methodology to the professor’s speech as a stimulating and motivating element for the student.

According to the literature review, role-playing techniques have long been used as an innovative, engaging, and active learning method in which students spontaneously act out characters assigned to them within a social scenario [1]. Practitioners and theorists alike have suggested that role playing produces numerous benefits. It has been argued, for example, that role-based simulations promote classroom interaction and motivation, produce a more internal locus of control and sense of mastery, allow discovery of the strengths, weaknesses, and consequences of certain behaviors or attitudes, and provide a means for exploring divergent points of view. It has also been hypothesized that role playing might increase empathy and altruism, perspective taking, and moral reasoning and enhance cognitive skills such as pattern recognition, decision making, creative thinking, and problem solving.

According to our experience during semester has been increased the motivation of students for the subject and has been observed a better empathy and spirit of collaboration among peers. The combination of the didactic techniques treated has not only resulted in a better development of specific competences of the subject, but also stimulates a whole series of transversal competences. At the individual level we can emphasize the capacity of critical thinking, self-motivation or the improvement of communicative skills. In addition, competencies have also been worked out at group level such as the ability to work as a team and the ability to delegate and collaborate with colleagues.

Keywords: role-playing, market research, classroom interaction, motivation.

1 ROLE-PLAYING TECHNIQUES

Kurt Lewin (1974), after a series of studies, concluded that the situation in which an individual can participate, express opinions and share them with others, is much more effective for learning and for changing attitudes than that in which the subject remains passive and in the position of listener.

For that reason and to put into practice techniques of active participation in an effective way we have to adopt the role of participatory teacher giving importance to the students in the decision making process, respecting their participation and valuing it as a person. With this objective, the professor will observe the dynamic processes of the group and promote the collaboration of all in the resolution of
the problems raised so as to promote group responsibility and create an environment that facilitates positive relationships.

The purpose of role-playing techniques is to facilitate the acquisition of skills such as social perspective, empathy and role-taking. It deals with aspects such as the direction of interpersonal relationships, or the rational and emotional motivations that act in decision making. Through continued practice in role-playing, students explore the feelings, attitudes, and values that influence their behavior, as they feel compelled to discover and accept the role of others. The improvement of the capacity of conflict resolution, as well as the assumption of the consequences that derive from the decision-making are also aspects worked in the role-playing [2].

In the search for a description of role-playing, we can say that it consists in dramatizing, through dialogue and perhaps even improvised interpretation, a situation that presents a problem or issue to be solved. This question must be open-ended in order to give rise to possible interpretations and solutions. The presence of different characters allows to introduce different points of view and different readings before the same event [2].

Some of the main objectives of role-playing techniques are:

1. Going in depth into a problem, deeper than we could with other techniques.
2. Use real-life problems and current issues of social relevance.
3. Encourage communication in the group and increase participation.
4. It allows to develop the understanding of the attitudes of other people allowing to put "in the place of the other".

In order to achieve the objectives visualized by the implementation of this technique, it is necessary to stimulate the group throughout the whole process and to make clear that we all participate, either as actors or as observers. We should not seek to create a serious, but real environment. This relaxed atmosphere will help participants to better assume their role.

As a summary, in Table 1 we present the main advantages and disadvantages of the Role-playing methodology.

| Table 1. Role-playing advantages and disadvantages |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| **ADVANTAGES**                   | **DISADVANTAGES**                        |
| Promotes an atmosphere of interest and study around the discussion of a problem. | It should not replace other teaching methodologies. Role-playing should be a complement but not the only training technique. |
| It is an ideal method for developing teamwork and decision making skills | Role-playing generates a high exposure for the participants and may arouse certain inhibitions. |
| It stimulates the creative and imaginative potential of the person as it must imagine how his character would think and act. | At times, there is a risk of misleading learning purposes by focusing on issues that are ultimately not core. |
| Allows to move from the field of abstractions to the realities and to make participants aware of the need to learn. | It is ineffective for certain content. |

2 MARKET RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Marketing research is the systematic gathering, recording, and analysis of data about issues relating to marketing products and services. Marketing research is often partitioned into two sets of categorical pairs, either by target market:

- Consumer marketing research and Business-to-business (B2B) marketing research.

Or, alternatively, by methodological approaches:

- Qualitative and Quantitative marketing research.

Consumer marketing research is a form of applied sociology that concentrates on understanding the preferences, attitudes, and behaviors of consumers in a market-based economy, and it aims to understand the effects and comparative success of marketing campaigns. The field of consumer
marketing research as a statistical science was pioneered by Arthur Nielsen in 1923 founding the ACNielsen Company.

Thus, marketing research may also be described as the systematic and objective identification, collection, analysis, and dissemination of information for the purpose of assisting management in decision making related to the identification and solution of problems and opportunities in marketing [3] The goal of marketing research is to identify and assess how changing elements of the marketing mix impacts customer behavior.

Traditionally, marketing researchers were responsible for providing the relevant information and marketing decisions were made by the managers. However, the roles are changing and marketing researchers are becoming more involved in decision making, whereas marketing managers are becoming more involved with research [4]. The role of marketing research in managerial decision making is explained further using the framework of the DECIDE model (Table 3)

<table>
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<th>Table 3. The DECIDE model</th>
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<tr>
<td>Define the marketing problem</td>
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<td>Enumerate the controllable and uncontrollable decision factors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collect appropriate information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify the best solution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop and implement a marketing plan</td>
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<td>Evaluate the decision and the decision process</td>
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</table>

The DECIDE model conceptualizes managerial decision making as a series of six steps. The decision process begins by precisely defining the problem or opportunity, along with the objectives and constraints [5]. Subsequent, the possible decision factors that make up the alternative courses of action (controllable factors) and uncertainties (uncontrollable factors) are enumerated. Then, relevant information on the alternatives and possible outcomes is collected. The next step is to select the best alternative based on chosen criteria or measures of success. Then a detailed plan to implement the alternative selected is developed and put into effect. Last, the outcome of the decision and the decision process itself are evaluated.

3 DYNAMIZATION OF THEORETICAL CLASSES OF MARKET RESEARCH USING NEW TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

3.1 Objective of the project

From the previous experience teaching theory in the area of market research, the conclusion is drawn that by involving students in the development of the class, the process of learning and understanding of the contents worked is improved, increasing the attention during the classes and the motivation on the matter treated.

For this reason and with the intention of focusing efforts on facilitating student learning, the possibility of introducing elements that decongest the theoretical classes of Market Research of its more academic and abstract nature to give them greater dynamism and in turn bring the concepts to a more applied plane, implying, at all times, the students in their development.

With this project we hoped to obtain a better use of the theoretical classes by the students and a better assimilation of the contents treated in them. To do this in the development of each of the themes we have used a selection of alternative teaching methodologies to the master exhibition as a dynamic and motivating complement for the student.

3.2 Methodology

Our didactic proposal is based on techniques of active participation, concretely we work with four cases of role-playing and that have been developed along several subjects of the program of the
subject Market Research. However, in the present paper we will only present the first one them, as the other ones are still under improvement.

This has involved working cooperatively in each one of the four cases which, in turn, has helped students to assume their role in a work team, assess their behavior and areas for improvement, as well as taking a professional position in their work group.

3.2.1 Objective

The objectives of using this technique are to strengthen what has been learned in class, to verify the appreciation and understanding of the contents studied, in addition to establishing closer relations between students and between students and teacher and that, hopefully, help to successfully develop the rest of activities.

3.2.2 Phases

A. Previous programming by the professor

Analyze the level of knowledge acquired by the students, as well as the number of students in the classroom in order to compose an activity appropriate to the characteristics of it.

B. Motivation

The professor explains to the students how the activity will take place: “It consists of staging a real situation that could occur in the meeting room of any company in the world. The objective is to clarify the roles of all people involved in the process of defining a market research and the difficulties and interests involved in the process”.

To carry out the performance the participation of a number of volunteers is required. The rest of the students will form discussion groups of approximately 6 people.

The professor expounds that the action is located in a meeting room of a company in the tile industry that wants to launch a new type of stone simulation tile but they do not know which audience could be interested in this product. In the room we will have representatives of the tile company that seeks to contract a market research (two people) and two representatives of the market research company.

Four volunteers are requested. Two people to form the company’s tile team and two other people to compose the market research company's team.

C. Preparation for the role-play

The teacher gives the information necessary for the representation, indicating what the conflict is, what characters are involved and what situation is going to be dramatized. Adding additional indications to the four members composing the staging.

D. Role-playing

1st) The two representatives of the market research company arrive to the meeting room, present themselves and make a brief statement about their services.

2nd) Next, the representatives of the tile company present their information needs on the new type of stone simulation tile and the doubts that arise.

3rd) Representatives of the market research firm set out the range of options available to collect the necessary information.

In this phase each member of the team has a certain role to take previously indicated in private by the teacher.

Tile company team:

- Role A: Open approach towards hiring the market research company. Fully rely on the new product and its potential.
- Role B: More skeptical approach. Doubt the company’s market research intent and the need to hire the same.

Market Research Company Team:
Role A: Focus on trying to get the tile company to acquire the most complete package of services. Leads the conversation by the market research company.

Role B: More rational approach. Listens to the needs of the company and offers reasonable solutions. He/she does not argue aggressively.

4th) An agreement is reached. This agreement has not been fixed by the teacher, spontaneously will be reached depending on the volunteer students and subsequently analyzed and commented.

E. Discussion

After the staging each group will reflect on the observed and try to relate it to the different interests that come together in every process of market research. While it is true that the more complete the research, the better results will be obtained. But students should not forget the economic, monetary and time constraints that are suffered in the business environment.

F. Assessment

At the end of the dramatization, the different groups make an oral presentation with the main conclusions reached, as well as a list of the three main elements to take into account in any process of initial development of a commercial investigation.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The participation in the performance has been voluntary favoring a first contact without pressure. This has facilitated the non-cognitive development of students by putting into practice strategies for interacting with others, increasing their positive attitude towards the subject and their degree of sociability.

In turn, we have fostered the students’ cognitive development in terms of analysis and synthesis capacity, information management capacity and information analysis to make decisions.

With this form of participation we have achieved that the student has felt necessary for his group to successfully perform its role and, therefore, has participated with greater responsibility. He has been forced to learn to speak, for which he has had to use qualitatively better cognitive and learning strategies than to examine himself in writing.

As a result we have been able to see some truly original and useful presentations to assimilate the theoretical concepts and, above all, we highlight the positive attitude towards his work and that of his colleagues, which the students have shown throughout the development and practice of the activity.

Therefore, as practitioners and theorists alike suggested, role playing produces numerous benefits. It promotes classroom interaction and motivation, produces a more internal locus of control and sense of mastery, allows discovery of the strengths, weaknesses, and consequences of certain behaviors or attitudes, and provides means for exploring divergent points of view.

According to our experience during semester, it has increased the motivation of students for the subject and has been observed a better empathy and spirit of collaboration among peers. The combination of the didactic techniques treated has not only resulted in a better development of specific competences of the subject, but also stimulates a whole series of transversal competences. At the individual level we can emphasize the capacity of critical thinking, self-motivation or the improvement of communicative skills. In addition, competencies have also been worked out at group level such as the ability to work as a team and the ability to delegate and collaborate with colleagues.

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