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“Tell me and I will forget; show me, and I may remember; involve me and I will understand.”

Old Chinese proverb

L'Immeuble: French language and culture teaching and learning through projects in a
global simulation.

Beatrice Dupuy

Introduction

In recent years, foreign language (FL) scholars and practitioners have increasingly wrestled with the issue of communicative and cultural competence as goals of language instruction and how to reach them in the classroom, as mainstream curricular approaches and materials have proven to be rather ineffectual in supporting this endeavor. Finding sound, alternative, and theoretically-based and practical approaches that can help students acquire communicative and cultural competence in ways that can be meaningful and relevant to them has been a challenge.

Global simulation (GS), a project-based learning approach, offers an alternative approach to achieve the goals stated above. GS is “reality of function in a simulated and structured environment” (Jones, 1984, p.5). In other words, GS provides a way to create a representation of reality (e.g., an apartment building, a business, a village, a hotel, etc.) in which students function according to preselected roles as if they were actually these people. A variety of realia help construct the authentic setting: (e.g., in the case of an apartment building, notifications left by the building manager in the elevator, ‘for sale’ notices left by the residents in the lobby area, local
events posters, etc. can be used) and enhance role fulfillment. Action in the realistic environment is built around a series of small projects that arise as life in the setting unfolds and feed into the large project of the GS (e.g., in the case of an apartment building, its life story and that of its residents). All in all GS gives students integrated access to authentic input in the target language and culture, allows them to operate as if they were in the target culture, while being – through dramatic identification – affectively involved, and offers an environment where language and culture learning as a process can be emphasized through the use of formative assessment and students’ metacognitive awareness is promoted through debriefing sessions.

This chapter begins with an examination of the theoretical basis for GS and how it can accommodate the shifts that have recently occurred in foreign language teaching and learning. The stages for implementing Debyser (1996)’s creative GS workbook L’immeuble are then described. Finally, student reactions to L’Immeuble are reported.

**The theoretical basis for global simulation, a project-based learning approach**

As an approach, GS has been around since the late 1970s, when it emerged from the BELC (Bureau pour l’Enseignement de la Langue et de la Civilisation Française à l’Étranger) research center as a response to a general dissatisfaction with the traditional language teaching and learning paradigm which drove instruction in FL classrooms at the time (Caré, 1995; Debyser, 1973, 1974, 1996; Yaiche, 1996). In a seminal article entitled “La mort du manuel et le déclin de l’illusion méthodologique”, Debyser (1973) strongly criticized textbooks and the structural approach to language teaching and learning they promoted. He called for re-centering instruction on the student, encouraging more active learning, developing free expression and creativity, and fostering true communicative competence in culturally meaningful and relevant contexts.
Since the early 1990’s, many FL scholars and practitioners have shown renewed interest in GS as the majority of mainstream teaching university materials have, despite prefaces claiming otherwise, changed relatively little in form and content since the heyday of audiolingualism. Indeed, many textbooks continue to “be built upon the persistent assumption that the acquisition of a foreign language and its culture means studying discrete grammatical structures, vocabulary lists, and pieces of information” (Levine, 2004, p. 26), and as such fail to translate current theories of second language acquisition and communicative language teaching and learning into practice.

GS is certainly worth receiving a second look, but before examining its theoretical and empirical support, its key characteristics are first presented.

**Simulation/global simulation, definition and characteristics**

Most people have heard of simulation. A well-known example is that of NASA’s astronaut training simulator: a specifically modified four-engine jet aircraft designed to fly in parabolic arcs to produce brief weightless periods, giving the astronaut candidates a feel for spaceflight. Another example is OTIS, an online trading and investment simulator, which gives an opportunity for experienced investors to test new stock market strategies, and for new investors to learn the basics of stock trading. Finally, an example more germane to foreign language instruction is a simulation\(^1\) in which a group of students is a Concerned Citizens Action

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\(^1\) According to Jones (1984) simulation differs from role play on two levels: reality and power. Simulation is reality and role play is a play, a pretence, or a game. “In a business simulation, the business may be conducted by people who have never been in business in their lives, but their thinking and talking and decision-making are absolutely genuine. […]. The participants are not imitating businessmen, they *are* businessmen because they are functioning as businessmen.” (Jones, 1984, p. 21) Participants in a simulation cannot shape the world the way they want to. In addition, simulations are participants owned. In role plays, personalities and actions are often prescribed by the instructor, which reduces participants ownership and therefore takes away a major feature of simulation.
Committee, which pitches their recycling plan to the council of their city.

Various conceptualizations of simulation exist, however for the purpose of this chapter, Jones’ (1984) three key elements of simulation are used:

- **Reality of function**: even though a simulation is not reality, students must embrace their role (e.g., residents of an apartment building; stock brokers, business people, diplomats etc.), and behave and act within the simulation as if they actually were these people. As students bring life to a simulation, it takes on a reality of its own and “then the experiences of the participants become real, and the use of language becomes meaningful communication. Simulations thus encourage language participants to use their new language in the ways most people do in other (similar but real) situations” (Crookall and Oxford, 1990, p. 15).

- **Simulated environment**: a representation of reality is created around a single situation or premise (e.g.: an apartment building, a stock trading room, an IT business, an international conference, etc.) to promote role-acceptance and realization.

- **Structure**: action is built around a set of small projects that are not invented but are rather generated as action progresses, and contribute to the completion of a large project (e.g., the story of a building and its residents through the years; the advertising campaign of some new software, etc.).

Simulation is meant to be short-term, and is typically completed in a day or two. On the other hand, GS involves students in a long-term, (a month or two, or an entire term) project. Global means:

- **Exhaustive**: Students are involved in inventing-re(creating) a part of the world, which has very clear and narrow borders so that spatial and chronological coherence and continuity can be more easily maintained. It is for this reason that one will want to choose a building rather than a
neighborhood or an entire city. The steps involved in the invention-re(creation) of the part of the world students have chosen, include setting and describing the stage and bringing it to life. For example, an apartment building will have a history that the residents can recall and tell you about. Once setting and describing the stage is done, a representative sample of the neighborhood’s population moves into the building. The residents not only have an administrative identity but also a past and a future that feed into the exchanges with neighbors, local representatives, store owners, etc. and shape the events and incidents that occur.

• **Integrated**: Opportunities for interpersonal, interpretive and presentational communication, both oral (e.g., role plays but also discussions for planning and evaluation) and written (e.g., students read a variety of documents, they write a wide range of documents, etc.) are available throughout a GS. These communicative exchanges naturally grow out of the needs that arise from the GS and are key to completing it successfully. Whether simulated, like the exchanges that take place among the characters or, authentic, like those that occur among students when sharing the results of individual or collective work, or evaluating and negotiating the next move, all communicative exchanges are driven by the GS and the need to take it forward.

• **Multidisciplinary**: In order to complete a GS. a large spectrum of curricular areas (geography, history, art, music, literature, math, etc.) other than language are tapped into as needed. In the first stage of a GS, for example, a location needs to be chosen and its physical characteristics described (geography: drawing a map and the relief of the area; math: distance calculations, scales, etc.). Next people move in (statistics: population sample, age pyramid; demography, etc.) their biographies are written (geography: place of birth; history: date of birth, etc.). As they run into each other, they may talk about the weather (geography: seasons, climate,
etc.), their likings (art, music, etc.), etc. Throughout a GS, students need to draw from multiple sources to work on the various projects it includes.

- **Multidimensional**: Academic and practical skills (taking pictures of residents with a digital camera; building the set of the GS; writing collaboratively using a wiki, etc.) as well as cognitive and employability skills (goal setting, project planning, product archiving on a web server, self-assessment, leadership, etc.) can be promoted, and affective behaviors such as self-confidence and risk-taking can be fostered.

- **Inclusive**: Teacher and students work in a tight knit partnership in which students no longer sit on the side lines but play a central decision-making role. Students take control of their own destiny within a GS.

The key characteristics of GS clearly reflect a number of current teaching and learning principles both in and out of this field and make GS a strong contender to answer the call from many FL scholars and practitioners for an alternative approach, one which can facilitate the development of communicative and cultural competence in ways that are meaningful, relevant and motivating to students.

**Theoretical and empirical support of GS**

*Experiential learning and GS*

GS finds strong support in learning theories in which cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal changes are mostly the result of *experience* and fully integrates the principles of experiential learning theory.

Experiential learning, rooted in Dewey’s (1938) view and that of his followers on learning and its relation to real experience, is effective in enhancing learner motivation and fostering higher cognitive skills as well as in enabling students to gain deeper understandings and valuable
content knowledge. According to Kolb (1984), “Essentially, learning takes place through the experiences which the learner has; that is, through the reactions he makes to the environment in which he is placed” (p. 63). Like Kolb (1984), Joplin (1995), argues that “all learning is experiential”, and further specifies that “this means that anytime a person learns, he must “experience” the subject, significantly identify with, seriously interact with, form a personal relationship with, etc.” (p. 15). However, both Kolb (1984) and Joplin (1995) insist that providing experience for students is not enough to be called experiential learning, it is reflection on that experience that turns experience into experiential learning. Besides the aspects of teacher feedback, debriefing, and focus, a fourth aspect is added by these later educators and others: emotional input. Maher (1987) indicates that, “knowledge always has, and indeed should have, an emotional component, a feeling component, that comes from the student’s sense of purpose, sense of connection to the material and the particular context”(p. 96). It is important to develop “a community of students” which gives them the opportunity to find their own voice in relation to the project in which they are engaged, thereby constructing knowledge from their individual and shared experience.

Recognizing the need to provide authentic use opportunities and foster positive affect for language acquisition, FL scholars and practitioners have incorporated these experiential learning principles into recent approaches of language/culture teaching and learning. One example is the project-based learning (PBL) approach. A project can be defined as “A unit of work involving constructive thought and action in connection with learning, including a goal, a series of actions (activities or tasks) and a pre-defined sequence” (Tremblay, Duplantie, and Huot, 1990, pp. 58-59). The project defined at the outset of the unit “creates the need to know certain language elements and the need to practice certain communicative situations to complete the final project
successfully. It also provides an interesting and authentic context for the integration of cultural and general language education content related to the project. The activities or tasks of the units are sequenced in such a way as to lead the students step-by-step to the final project” (Turnbull, 1999, pp. 549-550). The initial phase of the project involves students pooling together their preexisting (linguistic and content) knowledge about the topic, agreeing on the final project. The last phase of the project, involves them in presenting their final product and reflecting on learning: what they accomplished, what they did not.

Experiential learning holds much promise for SLA in terms of communicative and cultural competence, motivation and engagement, which are examined next.

*Communicative competence and GS*

In the mid 1960s, Chomsky’s notion of competence was expanded to a broader notion of communicative competence which refers to the ability to function in a communicative setting by using not only grammatical knowledge but also gestures and intonation, strategies for making oneself understood, and risk-taking in attempting communication (Bachman, 1990; Canale and Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia; Dörnyei, and Thurrell, 1995; Hymes, 1972).

One major question that was raised then and is still raised today is whether the classroom can provide the type of experience students need to develop communicative competence. In the traditional teacher-centered language classroom, the teacher controls communication and genuine conversation is generally absent which consequently prevents the full range of registers found in the real world to be available to students.

Watson and Sharrock (1990) see in GS an opportunity to “declassroom” the classroom which involves “1) restructuring relations between teacher and learner and 2) reconstructing the relevance of educative tasks” (p. 233). GS rectifies the teacher-learner imbalance in the language
classroom in two ways. It does so by placing “the onus on the students to do things for themselves and to discover what they need to know, where guidance displaces instructions” (Watson and Sharrock, 1990, p. 234). Furthermore, it provides a whole range of conversational models between different types of speakers in different types of speech situations which allows students to be exposed not only to various registers but also verbal and nonverbal cultural behaviors that accompany discourse, all of which would not be possible in the traditional language teaching paradigm.

GS builds on the principles that language use and language learning are facilitated when students collaborate on projects that 1) are challenging, communicative, worthwhile, and absorbing and 2) provide opportunities for student ownership and participation in their own language learning. Both principles can trigger powerful intrinsic motivation, which leads to better learning. One theory of intrinsic motivation that is well suited to GS is that of ‘flow’, which Csikszentmihalyi (1990) represents as an experiential state characterized by intense focus and involvement that leads to improved performance on the task one is currently engaged in.

The conditions associated with ‘flow’ can be characterized along four dimensions: 1) a balance exists between challenge and skills that prompts students to be totally engaged in the task; 2) students notice that their attention is entirely focused on the task; 3) students find the task interesting and relevant; 4) students perceive a sense of control over the task.

Student reactions to the GS examined in this chapter seem to indicate that many of them encountered these conditions and experienced ‘flow’. A student wrote, “It was great to work in a group on creative writing in another language. It increases the complexity of talking about creative writing, sort of doubling the difficulty and putting extra emphasis on word choice and expression” (conditions # 1 and 2). One student confided, “I have to say that I have enjoyed
having the chance to practice my French outside of the box, outside the normal frame of learning a language. It was great to assume the role of my character and take all the characteristics that I believe she should have from seeing characters like her in movies, and from stumbling upon real-life ones in Paris” (condition #3). Another student indicated, “The most fun aspect of the project was the opportunity to be creative; we are not often afforded opportunities like this in the university setting. I think that the more opportunities students have for personal input on a project, the more ownership of it they will take” (condition #4)

Given its principles and features described earlier in this chapter, GS can provide a learning environment in which students are very likely to experience flow as indicated above.

Cultural competence and GS

In 1996, Grittner offered the following historical overview of the teaching and learning of culture in the FL classroom: “Earlier approaches tended to view culture as a means to some end… As for method, the student was to receive and store information about the target culture… More recent approaches have placed the emphasis on content…more emphasis has been put on having students discover cultural data rather than having it ‘fed’ to them as static information” (p. 18.) In other words, culture learning has come to be perceived as “the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture general knowledge, skills and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individual from other cultures. It is a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively” (Paige, Jorstad, Siya, Klein, and Colby, 2000, p. 50).

Culture learning as a process is grounded in experiential learning theory and can be best promoted by implementing pedagogies congruent with the theory it is rooted in. In each phase of GS, students work closely with a variety of authentic documents rich in information about the
target language and culture. As they do, they can perceive certain aspects of the target culture and form hypotheses about its behaviors, attributions or expectations, which they confirm or disconfirm by looking at additional documents. Students also examine related features in their own culture. For example, students note that in French birth announcements, time of birth, weight, and size are traditionally omitted. The parents, whose names figure prominently, usually announce the birth of the child, rather than the child or his/her siblings. However, they also note that in French birth announcements today, time of birth, weight, and size are increasingly included, and siblings often announce the birth rather than parents. French birth announcements are increasingly more like birth announcements from the native culture. Students make hypotheses on why certain information would be included or omitted, why the layout would be what it is, and what this reveals about the target culture. As Kramsch (1993) indicates “understanding a foreign culture requires putting that culture in relation to one’s own … an intercultural approach to the teaching of culture is radically different from a transfer of information between cultures. It includes a reflection both on the target and the native culture” (p. 205). Students convey their new learning in the artifacts they create and archive and the self-reflection they engage in, which provide the basis for systematically assessing their learning about culture as a discovery process.

An assessment tool in keeping with language and culture learning as process rather than product, are portfolios (Abrams, 2002; Allen, 2004; Jogan, Herdia, and Aguilera. 2001; Moore, 1994; Lee, 1997; Wright, 2000). Delett, Barnhardt, and Kevorkian (2001) indicate that “Portfolios provide a portrait of what students know and what they can do, offer a multidimensional perspective of student progress over time, encourage self-reflection and participation, and link instruction and assessment” (p. 559). A portfolio is naturally embedded in
GS as students need to 1) archive over the course of the simulation their artifacts, which reflect the new insights and understandings they gain in the process and 2) self reflect on their own learning overtime. As such GS, as a format, can facilitate teaching culture and assessing students’ cultural learning process.

GS is a powerful approach in language teaching with considerable theoretical and empirical support. Furthermore, many practical features, detailed in the following section, make it an appealing curricular approach to language and culture teaching.

**L’Immeuble, an implementation model**

In this section, a semester-long GS implemented in a third-year (intermediate-high intermediate) French course at a large university in the southwest United States is examined. This course is part of a set of required courses for French majors and minors and focuses on reading and writing in a cultural context.

In order to promote both communicative and cultural competence, in ways that can meet and accommodate student needs and interests, an alternative to the approach in place then was sought and implemented. A number of considerations came into play when deciding to adopt and implement a French apartment building GS for which *L’Immeuble*, a creative workbook written by Francis Debyser, would serve as the point of departure. Several steps were taken to ensure its success.

**Selecting L’Immeuble as a GS**

When choosing a project topic, Lee (2002) suggests that the following points be taken into account: learner background; interest and relevance of topic under consideration; ability of topic to spur learner imagination and creativity; appropriateness of topic for long-term work; link between topic and previously acquired language and culture knowledge. In this case, it was also
essential to find a topic which would make it possible to meet the goals and objectives set for the course by my department.

In third year courses at my institution, students are typically majoring or minoring in French, they have usually had a short immersion experience in France (Paris for the most part) or another French-speaking country. They are often preparing themselves for a longer immersion experience, generally in France, during which they will often renew the experience of living in a dorm or with a family.

Given this set of factors, *L’Immeuble* was a good candidate as it could offer the kind of context and experiences that would allow these students to tap into their acquired linguistic and cultural knowledge/experiences and would also meet their future needs. It also provided a framework in which the departmental course goals and objectives could be met, namely extensive reading of various genres of literature and extensive writing of various styles (portrait, description, critical review, correspondence, narration, etc.) to improve students’ reading comprehension and writing ability in French.

*L’Immeuble* has been conceived to offer a realistic approach to French urban culture. In this GS, students “move” into an apartment building as residents and live, by proxy of the simulation, their lives. Like most GSs, *L’Immeuble* follows a five-phase development sequence. In each of the five phases, students carry out a number of tasks which all lead to an artifact that can later on be integrated in the final project.

Integral to GS, each phase includes a briefing and debriefing session. In the briefing session, students are initiated into the simulation in a way that will activate their content, linguistic, and cultural background knowledge. “Accessing background knowledge before launching an activity helps enrich the learning experience by preparing the groundwork for new experiences to build
on top of old ones” (Knutson, 2003, p. 57). It is during briefing that students understand the pedagogical purpose and rationale for the simulation, which “can lead to greater learner awareness of, and involvement in, their own learning process” (Knutson, 2003, p. 57). In the briefing session, Jones (1984) cautions against overdoing the language briefing in particular as this may bring students to see themselves as students again which would prevent the GS to be genuine, and reiterates that “the aim of the simulation is not to produce correct words, grammar, or pronunciation, but to communicate effectively according to roles, functions and duties” (p. 38). Once the simulation has ended, students reflect in the debriefing session on their own learning and critique their own performance.

**Phase 1: choosing a location.** Selecting the setting is the responsibility of the students and no one else. Students, as they looked for an address for their apartment building, considered the particular location to select, the various neighborhoods, their history, their population make-up, their local economy, their local landmarks, etc. Students researched and read a variety of authentic materials (history articles, surveys, phone books, maps, etc.) that would help them decide. In this phase, students created the following artifacts:

- an address with number and street name plate which they drew
- a description of the neighborhood, of the exterior and interior of the apartment building
- a meaningful name for the store at the foot of the apartment building as well as a plate design, description of signs, small ads, etc. posted in the window

**Phase 2: populating the location and creating identities.** The residents and their domestic animals move into one of the fourteen units available in the apartment building. The identity of the residents is created in three distinct stages: 1) the administrative identity; 2) the biographical identity which fleshes out the residents by giving them a past; 3) the portrait which integrates the

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To see artifacts created by students, please visit [http://frenchgateway.coh.arizona.edu/F04/FREN320](http://frenchgateway.coh.arizona.edu/F04/FREN320)
information developed in the two previous stages and gives residents a psycho-social dimension that will later be used as a reference in the role plays and novel. In the first stage, students considered the age, nationality and socio-professional category of the residents who would move into their apartment building. They also reflected on the first names they would give residents on the basis of their birthday, the schools they attended, the degrees they received and the professional preparation they got, the schools and grade level attended by school-age residents, etc. In this phase, students produced the following items:

- an ID card with a photo, a first and last name, a birthplace, an age, a nationality, a profession, a family status, etc.
- an outgoing message on an answering machine
- a biography
- a portrait
- a description of a favorite room
- a description of the vehicle the character drives

**Phase 3: interactions.** Now that the setting is in place, that the residents have moved in, it is time to bring life to the apartment building by imagining the types of everyday conversation residents would strike, or not strike, (depending on the nature of their relations), as they meet in the stairwell, the elevator, in the neighborhood stores, etc. These interactions offer a range of affective situations that promote the development of both communicative and cultural competence. In this phase, students engaged in the following role plays:

- small talk about the weather
- ask for a favor
- gossip
- receive phone calls
- exchange recipes, books, music, etc.

**Phase 4: writings.** Students considered different kinds of writings residents might leave on a door, post on the apartment building blog, send or receive in their mailboxes, etc. In this phase, students produced the following artifacts:
• personal notes
• announcements
• small ads
• postcards and letters
• invitations
• drawings
• recommendations, etc.

Phase 5: events and incidents. Students develop their capacity to react accordingly to an event such as a love story involving two residents or an incident like a crime in the apartment building. It is in this phase that the final project comes together in the form of a romance or detective novel centered around the apartment building and its residents, and in which many of the artifacts created in earlier phases or dialogues exchanged throughout the GS will be inserted as needed. To present their final project to the class, several options can be entertained. For this GS, three were retained:

• a short movie
• a photo novella
• a short puppet show (this option was retained by one of the group as one of their characters, a 6 year old girl, was the narrator in the novel on which the show would be based, and this medium they thought would be appropriate for her to tell her story.)

Gathering the materials and resources needed

While L’Immeuble workbook includes some targeted quality input that can help students fulfill the various tasks included in the GS project by presenting useful models for learner later production, the input provided does certainly not meet Krashen (1983) ’s criteria of “quantity” necessary for students to develop communicative competence and cultural literacy. For this reason, books, web resources, video excerpts, references were included as they would provide students with the kind of integrated language and culture exposure that would be useful in achieving a more authentic GS. In GS, authentic documents are selected and used for their
content but they also happen to be a great source of linguistic and cultural data students can tap into when creating artifacts.

Novels

Over the course of the semester, for the purpose of the GS, students engaged in extensive reading by selecting six novels representing four genres: romance/coming of age, adventure/mystery, life narrative, and detective. Primarily selected for their content and interest, these novels also offered excellent linguistic and cultural models for neighborhood and room descriptions, portraits, biographies, dialogues, letters, and romance or detective novels, that students would later write. In addition to the novels, excerpts from Pérec’s (1978) *La Vie Mode d’Emploi* and (1983) *Espèces d’Espaces*, provided additional models. They can also help enhance students’ literary sense both as readers and writers.

Web resources

Web resources gathered by teacher and students were available at various stages of the GS. They helped students set the décor, decide who the residents would be, give them names and jobs (or not), name the store at the foot of the apartment building, just to name a few.

Since students needed to decide on an address for their apartment building, they consulted a variety of online resources about Paris that gave them an overview of Paris today: the various *arrondissements*, the divide between north-east and south-west Paris and its meaning both socially and economically, the *bobozation* of the French capital, the increasingly multiethnic and multicultural face of Paris. Students used this information to make informed decisions as to what the population make-up of their building would be, the marital and employment status of the residents, the type of apartments they would live in, the décor of their apartment, their leisure activities, their reading, music, and food preferences. Once they had settled on a possible
address, they made use of the search engine Voila to input it and get a picture of the actual apartment building, a view of the neighborhood and local stores, and a map of the area with its landmarks, parks, schools, and nearby metro stations.

To more authentically name the residents, students used a number of websites to find out about popular first names at the times their residents were born, about last names, their origin and where they are most commonly found in France. To decide where the residents were most likely to vacation and send parents, relatives, and friend living in the building postcards and letters to, students read surveys about the 35-hour work week and what the French think and say about it, French people’s preferred destinations, lodgings and activities on vacation, etc. This information would help shape the content of the correspondence residents would receive.

To decide on which vehicle a resident would drive, students looked at statistics about brand preferences among the French, visited the websites of the three main French car makers, and chose a vehicle based on a resident status, lifestyle, etc.

Besides providing useful cultural information, the web resources also provided good writing models for announcements of many kinds (births, weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs), invitations, notices, small ads (vehicles for sale in La Centrale du Particulier), etc. that residents would send or post on their door, on the apartment building blog, in their hallway, or in the entrance of their apartment building. In addition, the web proved useful to find pictures, maps, etc. to illustrate the artifacts as well as give students free access to online bilingual dictionaries, lexicons, and grammars.

*Video excerpts*

Once students had decided on the address of their apartment building, defined its surroundings, populated it with residents, developed the interpersonal relationships between
family members and between neighbors, they started playing the role of the residents. They called each other on the phone, met in the stairs, exchanged greetings, inquired about how they were doing, talked about the weather, asked favors, borrowed items they needed, gossiped, exchanged recipes, and attended the annual apartment owners’ meeting. To get a feel for the way these kinds of interaction would take place between residents and help students notice the differences and similarities between conversations in their culture and the target culture, they watched segments of *Forum Images*, a video which features the daily interactions of several residents in an apartment building in Paris. It gave them a visual image of what apartment building life in Paris looks like and what facial expressions, body language the French use when engaged in conversations. Furthermore, it gave them an opportunity to hear how conversational language differs from written language and be exposed to the use of intonation in real conversations.

All these additional materials were gathered in order to increase the amount of the input students would need to develop the communicative and cultural competence required for later use in their creative productions in French.

*Deploying appropriate and meaningful technology tools*

While *L’immeuble* workbook does not mention the use of new technologies, it is clear that they can provide key assistance not only in giving access to resources and models for completing the GS project, but also in promoting collaboration among peers inside and outside of the classroom. Recently Caré (1995) discussed the role technology could play in archiving in GS, I believe that the use of technology in GS can be pushed beyond that.

For the purpose of *L’Immeuble*, a website was created to post guidelines, rubrics and archive learner productions as they were completed. Having easy access to completed productions is
important in GS as they serve as references for later productions. Tools that could facilitate collaboration among students were integrated. Students had access to a forum, which they used to discuss their reactions to materials they had read or heard; a chat room, which they used to organize the completion of future tasks and a wiki\(^3\), which they used as a collaborative writing space.

In addition, online technologies assisted in creating an atmosphere that would closely reflect real life contexts. In the past couple of years, focused blogs, have sprung up everywhere, and neighborhood or apartment building blogs have become a popular means of giving a voice to a community in Paris and elsewhere (e.g.: Eiffel/Suffren, Paris-Marais, Montparsud are neighborhood blogs, le blog de Mouchotte is an apartment building blog). So a blog was integrated in the class website for the purpose of providing residents with a news outlet. On the blog, students posted greetings and/or a short introduction as they moved into the apartment building, small ads, restaurant recommendations, etc., activities that people regularly do in real life in the blogosphere.

**Determination of teacher and learner roles**

In a GS environment, the relation teacher-learner takes on a different form than the one we are accustomed to see in the traditional teaching-learning paradigm where the learner’s access to knowledge necessarily goes through the teacher who takes on the sole responsibility for all that happens in the classroom.

A GS is not taught. “The teacher is on the outside, not in the inside; he or she does not participate in the interaction, has no powers or responsibilities for the decision-making” (Jones, 1995, p. 11). In *L’Immeuble*, the major roles that the teacher assumes are those of resource

\(^3\) A wiki is a web application that enables documents to be written collectively in a simple markup language using a web browser.
person and architect. As a resource person, the teacher orients students to appropriate resources only if students request it, as the purpose is to lead students to become autonomous, to develop strategies to learn on their own by using sources other than the teacher. As an architect, the teacher divides and organizes the work in such a way that it would be easier for students to tackle.

When the roles of the teacher change so do the roles of the learner. “Just as there is no teacher… neither are there…students” (Jones, 1995, p. 11). In *L’Immeuble*, the role of the learner is no longer to listen and regurgitate information but to pull content together, negotiate meaning, reflect on learning, and come up with an appropriate final product.

**Deciding how students will be assessed**

Formative assessments and debriefing sessions are an integral part of GS since the focus is more on the process than on the product. Not only do students receive ongoing feedback from their teacher and peers, they are also involved in evaluating their performance and progress, which gives them a voice and promotes autonomy as well.

Within the framework of *L’Immeuble*, three sources of assessment are included: teacher peers, and students. The teacher provides measurable criteria related to each project objectives, makes sure students know and understand the criteria before working on a task, evaluates and makes suggestions. Students are involved in evaluating the teamwork of their peers. They evaluate their writing and offer suggestions for revision. For oral work, they make suggestions for improvement and show support. Students also evaluate their peers in terms of participation, ability to follow through, respect given to other team members in collaborative work. To develop learning strategies and build learner autonomy, students also have a chance to reflect on their own work in class.
The GS learning environment is one in which students are active participants in situations where they use authentic language to accomplish particular objectives, assess their performance and progress, and are in charge of their own learning process. In the following, student reactions to these features are discussed.

Student reactions to GS

At the end of the GS, students reflected on what they had learned, highlighted the positive and negative aspects of the GS to improve it for classes to come. Beckett (2002) reviewed the literature on L2 student evaluations of PBL and found that students had mixed feelings about this approach to learning. While students in this GS shared a couple of the concerns echoed by students in the studies Beckett (2002) reviewed, their evaluation of the project was overwhelmingly positive.

Many students particularly appreciated the collaborative aspect of the GS. One learner wrote, “This project was a great way to get involved in group work. It helped facilitate our learning and understanding of the French language because we had other people besides the teacher to help us with questions and doubts regarding grammar, sentence structure, and the basics the many of us tend to forget over the years. This project was very versatile and it ranged in a variety of things that in my opinion helped us all achieve a great ending. […]”. Another said, “What I liked best was collaborating with my group and being able to use my creativity to invent and actually write the story of a building and its residents in French”. These students highlight the importance of having a collaborative, holistic approach to language teaching and learning in which more knowledgeable peers can be sought for help. Collaborative learning also leads to more positive attributions for learning success, greater self-perception, and increased confidence with the target language.
Students also enjoyed having the opportunity to engage in creative writing, they appreciated having a say in the direction and shape of the project, it made it more meaningful and engaging, and, therefore worth the effort it required. Students also realized how they could tap into the knowledge they had acquired in previous and current classes and experiences. One learner mentioned, “I really enjoyed many aspects of L’Immeuble project. It allowed me to write in different ways that I had not tried before. I especially enjoyed writing the chapters of the novel after having read our class texts. This allowed me to internalize a lot of what I had learned through reading the books”. Another indicated, “The most fun aspect of the project was the opportunity to be creative; we are not often afforded opportunities like this in the university setting. I think that the more opportunities students have for personal input on a project, the more ownership of it they will take”. Contrary to some of the student reactions reported in Beckett’s (2002) literature review, here students welcomed having autonomy from the teacher, having control on the direction and shape of the GS, and learning in a non-traditional way.

Students attested that this project was more interesting and engaging that any other they had before. One learner volunteered, “I do want you to know that the apartment project has probably been my favorite thing in college to do in a class. I graduate next December too, so I’ve had MANY classes… Practically all of my friends and family were updated weekly on the latest from our immeuble”. While it is disheartening to read that this was one of the few projects deemed worthwhile by this student during four years of college, it is encouraging to see that GS, a PBL approach, can generate this type of interest and involvement.

A few students made negative comments and complained that, “It was a LOT of work, combined with all of the assignments in [their] other classes”. However, it is interesting to read that they do not ask to get rid of GS but rather to rethink the schedule of its implementation
given the limited number of contact hours of the course, “Sometimes, I didn’t have the time to dedicate to the creative writing project that I would’ve liked, and that was disappointing.” This student clearly enjoyed the GS but could not devote to it the necessary time due to school pressures and this led to frustration, and disappointment.

Students wholeheartedly endorsed GS, especially stressing the importance of collaborative work, student input in project and student autonomy.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, an implementation model for *L’Immeuble*, a GS designed for a French setting, was presented. While it is set in Paris, the premise is easily transferable to another city in the French-speaking world and elsewhere for that matter and the phases of the project can be readily transferred to other FL contexts.

GS is a viable alternative approach, one which, as rightly described by Levine (2004), “allows to move away from a linear, sequential, formulaic approach to learning about the target language and cultures” (p. 34) and ties well with current thinking in the field of second language acquisition. It promotes the use of language for real communication in a real cultural context and helps students achieve the goals of communicative and cultural competence. However, its implementation has yet to become a widespread reality in university foreign language classrooms.

**References**


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